A Sovereign People?

Lessons from Participatory Budgeting Experiences in the UK

A study of egalitarian and elitist democratic narratives animating the practice of citizenship, and their role in determining appropriate responses to the UK democratic deficit.

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ABSTRACT

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A study of egalitarian and elitist democratic narratives animating the practice of citizenship, and their role in determining appropriate responses to the UK democratic deficit.

Key words: Participatory budgeting; UK local governance; democratic deficit; sovereignty; participatory democracy; political participation.

This study explores the UK 'democratic deficit' through the question of citizen democratic appetite, taking the varying degrees of citizen mobilisation in different contexts as a point of departure. The ongoing struggles between (broadly) elitist and egalitarian democratic narratives provide an analytical framework. These narratives' underlying values and principles are illustrated through the US constitutional debates. Through this lens, the UK democratic deficit can be understood (at least partially), not as a failure of the system but as a measure of its success in containing citizen participation. The Porto Alegrean participatory budgeting experience provides a contrasting example of the egalitarian tradition which has inspired similar innovations around the world (in some cases, precisely in hopes of reinvigorating Western democracies). This study presents evidence from two such UK cases (gathered through participant observation and in-depth interviews). Newcastle's U-Decide programme and Bradford's 'Decision Day' both represent an encounter between the two narratives, and enable the values and assumptions held by citizens, elected representatives and state officials to be explored. In sum, they offer a compelling case that citizen engagement is stimulated by a more egalitarian democratic experience. However, such experiments are also shown to reflect deeply embedded 'representative habits of mind', which are revealed by a direct challenge to the democratic status quo. The study emphasises the value of a 'citizen-eye' perspective which focuses on democratic experience over outcomes, and the need for 'democratic activists' as well as active democrats, in order to create and defend the ideological space for democratic alternatives.

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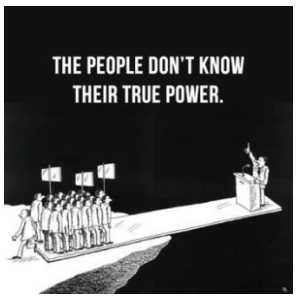

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> 'When participation meets the expectations of today's citizens, they will get involved.'
>
> (Power Inquiry, 2006:96)

This study is an enquiry into democratic appetite, the question of how and why we learn to *want* to be democratically active. The impetus stems from a profound sense of democratic failure in the UK, a sense not only that the system we call democracy falls far short of that ideal but that we, citizens of a country which has been proud to call itself a democracy, indeed, to refer to our legislative system as the 'mother of parliaments', are not ourselves active democrats. As an activist and as a democrat, I see a lot that needs doing, and I see many people who care – but I also see political movements for justice or social transformation struggling to inspire action for change. I see unjust and often undemocratic laws pass which don't appear to have a mandate – yet they pass, not because we want them, it seems, but because not enough of us stand up for an alternative. Too often, we do not enact the sovereignty of a democratic people governing ourselves. This has been called apathy, and yet throughout our own history and across the world there are countless examples of people taking control, fighting for democracy, for the right to self-determination, so together they can build the society they want to live in. Why not here?

The question arises, how do citizens acquire that appetite for democracy, that belief in democracy – and, crucially, that belief in *ourselves* as democrats, a belief not only that democracy is worth fighting for, but that we are 'the people' who must fight for it?

[1] Image widely available on the internet; source unknown.

The disengagement I am describing is generally known as the 'democratic deficit', being associated with a decline in voter turnout and loss of trust and interest in formal political institutions. Recognised as a phenomenon across the established Western democracies, it is understood to threaten their legitimacy (Norris, 2011; Pharr & Putnam, 2000). Explanations divide into 'demand-side' and 'supply-side' theories, the former focusing on a loss of civic interest on the part of citizens (most influentially, Putnam, 2000), while the latter highlight systemic deficiencies within the democratic state (for example, Hay, 2007). Where 'demand-side' accounts have been critiqued as tending towards tautology (for example, explaining disengagement by describing it, *op.cit*.:40), 'supply-side' approaches explore problems with the existing system (including extra-systemic social forces, most particularly global capitalism, see for example Crouch, 2004; Dryzek, 1996) and consider alternative – potentially more engaging – visions of democracy, along with possible strategies for achieving them (e.g. Smith, 2009; Fung & Wright, 2003; Barber, 1984). However, while arguably a more fruitful approach, this at times generates a focus on *how* we challenge imposed limits – which can presume the existing energy to do so (see for example, Coelho & von Lieres, 2010; Dryzek, 1996).

However, some theorists have noted the connections between 'supply' and 'demand' factors, in the sense that the system itself shapes citizen behaviour (notably, Eliasoph, 1998). As Carol Pateman (2012:10) puts it, 'the capacities, skills and characteristics of individuals are interrelated with forms of authority structures'. This perspective finds a contemporary form in the 'depoliticisation' research agenda, which understands 'anti-politics' as a 'societal phenomenon of declining interest and engagement in politics driven by neoliberal discourses, policies and institutions' (Wood, 2105:2).[2] In a sense, therefore, the democratic deficit is about how we learn to understand ourselves as democrats, about where *both* sets of actors in a state-citizen decision-making encounter agree that power lies. In this view, it is fundamentally about the location and enactment of sovereignty. Accordingly, the question of democratic appetite occupies a particular place in the literature. If, as these theorists suggest, it is the case that what we experience as democracy 'turns us away' from a sense of ourselves as democratic actors, what might turn us back?

[2] Fawcett & Marsh (2014:171) note, however, that there have been surprisingly few attempts to link this literature to work on political participation.

This question drew me to the idea of direct citizen involvement in the allocation of public funds, known as Participatory Budgeting, for two reasons. Firstly, the original participatory budgeting (PB) process, which between 1989 and 2004 saw many thousands of citizens annually decide the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre's entire investment budget, has gained global symbolic status as the 'nearest thing to a working example of participatory democracy' (Wainwright, 2003:30). It has spread across Latin America and more recently around the world, representing a tide of enthusiasm for more direct forms of engagement. Since 2004, this has included this country, making PB an ideal focus for an investigation into attitudes to and appetites for increased democracy in the UK. However, at the global level, PB has also been taken up by more conservative forces such as the World Bank (see Shah, 2007). Therefore, it is additionally of interest because it represents a site of struggle over conflicting values, which different actors with competing worldviews assign to the idea of 'democracy'.

This matters because controlling or shaping the definition of democracy, controls or shapes its operation, effectiveness and outcomes. Democracy is not an empty vessel or a neutral structure to be inhabited equally by different power-holders. How we as citizens and political actors theorise democracy affects how it is manifested in the world – and how it is manifested overwhelmingly affects how power is exercised and by whom. Thus, our conceptualisation of democracy is centrally pertinent to the question of who chooses to be democratically active, and why.

In the sweep of democratic history, we can identify two primary orientations which have occupied this terrain, termed the 'Order of Equality' and the 'Order of Egoism' in Filippo Buonarroti's account of the 1796 Conspiracy of the Equals, in which he presented equality as the fundamental goal of the French Revolution (Buonarroti, 1828). Porto Alegrean PB is located firmly in the tradition of the egalitarian narrative. Participatory democracy is closely associated with equality in two senses, firstly in its commitment to substantive equality, but (importantly) also because the idea of citizen capacity is foundational (see Pateman, 2012; Barber, 1984). Western representative democracies, on the other hand, belong to the contrasting (liberal) democratic narrative. The connections between this tradition of thought and capitalist social organisation (see Schumpeter, 1943) indicate a very different understanding of

and relationship to equality, as formal rather than substantive, and mandating an 'expert' political class instead of facilitating citizen decision-making.

As an example – perhaps *the* modern-day example – of participatory democracy, Porto Alegrean PB has generated a great deal of academic and practitioner interest, exploring its democratic nature and associated outcomes (for example, Wampler, 2007; Baiocchi *et al*, 2005; Baierle, 2003; Abers, 2000; Santos, 1998). Fung & Wright (2003) present it as a '*Real Utopia*',[3] a prime illustration of 'empowered participatory governance'. As PB spread, a second wave of literature took a comparative approach, identifying context factors associated with 'successful' or transformative PB (see Sintomer *et al*, 2012; Wampler, 2007; Avritzer, 2006; Cabannes, 2004). One of the primary context factors identified is the existence of a mobilised citizenry, capable of both cooperation and contestation (see Wampler & Avritzer, 2004); that is to say (perhaps unsurprisingly), PB generates the most significant transformative outcomes in the context of an empowered civil society. In this sense the PB literature itself, while clearly highlighting the role of PB as a 'school for citizenship' (Pontual, 2014), nonetheless often approaches what I have called the 'democratic appetite' of citizens as a context feature.

While this analysis undoubtedly helps us understand the operation and limitations of PB practice, it also poses something of a problem when considering the democratic deficit of established Western democracies. Arguably, knowing that starting from a different context would offer a better chance of transformative outcomes is comparable to the suggestion that eradicating poverty would be easier if your country was rich! I am, therefore, fully in agreement with Gianpaolo Baiocchi, Patrick Heller and Marcelo Silva (2011:xii) when they suggest that there is 'something defeatist … in the social scientific diagnosis that asserts that there are necessary preconditions for democratic empowerment'. In my view, their 2011 book, *Bootstrapping Democracy*, significantly moves forward the discussion about democratic outcomes by considering the impact of Brazilian PB processes *in relation to their context*. In this study, I consider UK experiences of PB in this light.

[3] The *Real Utopias Project* explores proposals for radical social change, through normative discussions of underlying principles and pragmatic problems of institutional design. PB is therefore an ideal case study. See http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/RealUtopias.htm.

Such an approach is fruitful because democracy is arguably most usefully thought of as a journey, not a condition or a structure. This perspective suggests an iterative (interactive) relationship between action and concepts. Therefore, in this thesis, I identify threads in our democratic journey, in order to understand the process by which we arrived at the assumptions and system that we have, and the values, agendas and struggles which shaped that process. The aim of this endeavour is to arrive at a better understanding of what openings and possibilities might exist for re-imagining our democratic future.

Situating the UK democratic deficit in this broader conceptual framework focuses attention on a number of key questions, which can be usefully explored through a close look at PB in the UK. Firstly, what are the associated values inherent in the different models of democracy represented by the existing UK system and the new participatory spaces? Secondly, what does this understanding tell us about the nature of the democratic deficit itself? Thirdly, what is the relationship between these values and citizen behaviour? And finally, what can this line of thought offer us with regard to determining an appropriate response to the democratic deficit?[4]

THE UK EXPERIENCE OF PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

PB arrived in this country in the early 2000s, with a social justice NGO, Church Action on Poverty, playing a major role in its development. While the individual processes have been limited in scale (citizens disbursing discrete, often relatively small, pots of ring-fenced public funds), the movement quickly attracted broader state recognition. This resulted in the publication of a national strategy in 2008 (DCLG, 2008b). By 2010, over 100 local authorities reported that they had undertaken some form of PB (Hall & Röcke, 2013), with the most recent assessment suggesting that over £25 million have been spent using PB in the UK.[5] In keeping with the nature of its origins, both state and civil society PB advocates (in many cases inspired directly by Porto Alegre) have radical democratic aspirations which reach beyond the limited scale of achievements to

[4] These questions also illustrate what I am *not* concerned with. My focus is on what encourages democratic activity, rather than, for example, theoretical models of democratic legitimacy or effective strategies for democratic action (i.e. what works in the democratic pursuit of particular goals). My starting point is a commitment to greater citizen involvement; my focus is therefore on how that is facilitated.

[5] This figure is an estimate made by the PB Network in 2014, for use in their policy briefing series (PB Network, 2014a; 2014b).

date – PB in the UK has consistently been supported as part of a wider movement for participatory democracy.[6] Thus, it presents a clear contrast to the democratic narrative embodied by its 'host', the UK's existing representative system.

Accordingly, the UK experience of PB affords a particular insight into the questions that I have raised because it has engendered an encounter between two distinct democratic narratives. This aspect of UK PB was facilitated because, unlike many of the new opportunities for citizen participation which have proliferated in recent years (Davidson & Elstub, 2014), it began life as a local (value-driven) innovation which spread and developed between municipalities, rather than as a nationally designed programme. PB processes which preceded national take-up and a corresponding drive towards codification[7] offer a lens on what we might call 'democracy development', the process of democratic learning through experience. We can, therefore, learn from the journey that organisers, practitioners and participants take together.

This journey is fundamentally about democracy, not council finance or community development; it is about who has the right to make the decisions that affect us, on what basis, and why. As people wrestle with learning about PB and how to achieve their vision for the process, their views of and assumptions about democracy are to some extent revealed. In this vein, it is relevant that as a 'new' decision-making structure PB has been a more open site for the expression of democratic values and aspirations. It carries less enculturated baggage regarding what we 'know' about democracy, and allows us to observe what might be possible in terms of citizen democratic engagement.[8]

Crucially, PB in the UK is of interest in relation to the problem of the democratic deficit because it has generated a level of engagement (albeit on a scale in keeping with the nature of the processes) which belies the easy characterisation of the 'democratic deficit' as citizen apathy. The evidence presented here

[6] To illustrate, the volunteer-run PB Network describes itself as bringing together 'individuals and organisations from across the UK who support participatory democracy' (PB Network, 2015).
[7] See, for example, the 'how-to' guide produced in connection with *Community First*, an £80 million government-funded grant scheme (PB Partners, 2013).
[8] This study is not an evaluation of PB in the UK. I am primarily concerned with what the experiences reveal about democratic beliefs, values and practices (and by association, the democratic deficit), rather than whether they have been 'successful' according to either their organisers aims or externally imposed criteria.

suggests that the experience of a decision-making process which is rooted in more egalitarian democratic values can stimulate the democratic appetite.

This study focuses on two UK cases, Newcastle and Bradford; both of which were amongst the earliest examples of PB in the country. Newcastle's U-Decide programme (the local name for PB) has arguably been the most embedded UK process to date. As a flagship programme of the then Liberal Democrat administration, U-Decide benefited from strong local political commitment. It was supported by a permanent team of council officers, and ran for over five years.[9] It is particularly of interest because officers, councillors and citizens all played central developmental roles in the programme, enabling a deep insight into the variation across their different perspectives and so into the nature of the 'democratic encounter'. Bradford, while a shorter lived experience (2004-2006), provides a contrasting case. Local organisers rooted PB in an approach which explicitly linked social justice and democracy, in the face of vocal (and ultimately decisive) opposition from the Conservative-led district council.

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTERS

There are two distinct halves to this thesis. I begin with some broad reflections on the nature of what we understand to be democracy, with the aim of establishing a conceptual approach to the democratic deficit, before moving on to an empirical exploration of what we can learn about the democratic deficit through two UK PB processes. Thus, I present a detailed examination of very small-scale cases against the backdrop of larger historical processes, in order to make visible underlying narratives which can be lost in the fine grain of daily interactions (a robust engagement with the reality at local level being vital if we are to usefully understand the dynamics of the democratic deficit, this being the primary context for citizen action). As PB scholars Baiocchi *et al* (2011:39) note, 'democracy is first and foremost a local affair;' citizens are most likely to encounter the state and exercise their democratic rights in local arenas.

I begin with some methodological reflections. Chapter 2 introduces the engaged case study approach I have used, and considers synergies between participatory research and the values inherent in an egalitarian understanding of

[9] Though other areas have allocated more money using PB; for example, in 2008/2009, Tower Hamlets disbursed £1.2million of the core council budget in two rounds of PB.

democracy. The process was iterative in the sense that the conceptual terrain of democratic narratives which provide my analytical structure emerged through analysis of field data in Newcastle.

In chapter 3, I present the egalitarian and elitist democratic narratives in historical perspective. The aim of this chapter is to explore modern democracy as a historical construct, through a key moment in its development. The American Constitutional debates offer perhaps the best example of a sustained and recorded debate between two very different visions of democracy, and moreover, illustrate an approach to representative democracy which has fundamentally shaped Western political history.[10] A close look at these debates therefore helps us understand the distinctions between the two broad democratic tendencies, as well as the connections and cross-fertilisation between them – and, crucially, reminds us that these are debates, not 'truths'.

Struggles such as this over democratic meaning illustrate how different definitions of democracy rest on different views of human nature. By this, I mean different understandings of what we believe ourselves and others (the 'masses' that we might trust or fear) to be capable of as democratic citizens. Each definition of democracy also implies a corresponding view of state and society, and importantly, a differing set of social goals – the competing agendas of the actors who are struggling for the meaning of democracy in practice. To understand democratic developments today, we need to understand the utopian visions which have inspired both narratives within democratic history. Chapter 3 thus introduces key themes which I will explore throughout the study, with reference to different democratic contexts. These include differing perceptions of citizen capacity, and differing perceptions of the representative relationship.

Chapter 4 takes up these themes in the context of the existing system in the UK. Alongside an overview of evidence for the existence and nature of the democratic deficit, I explore the extent to which the UK system can be considered a manifestation of the elitist democratic narrative. To this end, I consider the anti-democratic tendencies of assumptions and practices which inform democratic process in the UK (including those associated with the

[10] The same exercise could be undertaken through many different moments in democratic history, most obviously the French Revolution. In this vein, chapter 3 also reflects briefly on broadly contemporaneous events in Britain.

dominant neoliberal political and economic discourse). Reflecting on the limitations of the UK system in the light of values associated with the elitist democratic narrative, I argue that the 'democratic deficit' can in some sense be considered a success of the system, rather than a failure. In other words, the system's tendency to limit citizen participation in favour of elite control is rather more in keeping with its foundational premises than is generally acknowledged. I conclude that the location of sovereignty, firmly held by Parliament in the UK, is a central element in understanding the democratic deficit, and thus in shaping our perception of what an effective response might comprise.

Chapter 5 provides an equivalent exploration of the egalitarian democratic narrative, through the example of Porto Alegrean Participatory Budgeting. In this chapter, I consider the principles, practices and outcomes of participatory democracy as observed in Porto Alegre. I reflect on the coherence between this process and the values associated with the egalitarian tradition, again picking up the themes of citizen capacity and the nature of the representative relationship. Porto Alegre is not presented as a blueprint for a different democratic process, but as evidence that other (explicitly radical) conceptualisations of democracy are feasible, and as inspiration, what Baiocchi *et al* (2011:pxiii) have called 'a broader imagination of the possible.' I make the case that democratic motivation in Porto Alegre is closely connected to the belief that participation will 'make a difference' to social outcomes. I argue that this is a 'citizen-eye view' of democracy which prioritises the process of engagement (and therefore considers outcomes to be justified through participation, not vice versa).

Given that chapter 5 reflects on what we in the UK can learn from Porto Alegre about democratic engagement and the location of sovereignty, in chapter 6 I return to the question of context in relation to transformative democratic experiences. With this in mind, I review findings from comparative PB literature regarding 'ideal context factors' for successful PB. These emphasise the importance of shared commitment and capacity on the part of civil society and political actors, alongside the degree of power available to potential PB processes. With reference to the UK, I consider the development of PB to date and suggest that, while our conditions are far from ideal, this serves to focus our attention on understanding how to make a difference from this starting point.

Accordingly, I review four significant implications of the UK context: ‘representative habits of mind’ resulting from the dominant democratic culture, the ambiguous role of a professionalised voluntary sector increasingly oriented to service delivery rather than citizen voice, a tendency towards a depoliticised presentation of democratic reform arising from a political environment hostile to radical initiatives, and the difficulty of identifying sufficient operational autonomy to create sustained alternative experiences. This context provides a framework for analysing and understanding the UK PB experience.

Chapters 7 and 8 present evidence from Newcastle’s U-Decide programme. Chapter 7 introduces the programme and reviews its key outcomes. U-Decide is a binding, direct decision-making space, with opportunities for deliberation and a central role for citizens. However, while it was strongly supported by the local elected state, it was nonetheless a discrete decision-making space, poorly linked in to the existing representative system. This notwithstanding, U-Decide provides compelling evidence than even a limited experience of more egalitarian democracy can have a powerful impact on citizens’ democratic appetite. Participation in U-Decide represented a marked increase on prior engagement mechanisms, had a positive impact on relationships between state and citizens, and fostered significant democratic learning.

Chapter 8 reflects on the extent to which ideological tensions over the nature of democracy nonetheless ultimately constrained U-Decide’s potential as a transformative ‘supply-side’ response to the democratic deficit. I review citizen motivations for involvement in U-Decide, and make the case that an important aspect of the deficit may lie in the discrepancy between what is on offer and the basic democratic values held by citizens. There is an important exception to this, in the case of citizens who are used to representing their communities via existing, more traditional, engagement mechanisms, and who displayed what I have called ‘representative habits of mind’. I also consider the assumptions and actions of state actors, including elected representatives and officers advocating or supporting U-Decide, in order to evaluate the extent to which the programme in practice represents an attempt to subvert the existing context towards a more egalitarian model. The evidence suggests that activists’ efforts to enact an alternative democratic vision are to an extent hampered by persistent

‘representative habits of mind’, which, if they go unchallenged, can describe a limit to the transformative potential of processes such as U-Decide.

In chapter 9, I present evidence from the complementary case of Bradford. Here, the PB experience was consciously located in a social justice framework which was explicitly critical of the status quo, and therefore somewhat less prey to insidious ‘representative habits of mind’. In Bradford, the response of citizens was unequivocal, with around 300 citizens attending a single decision-making event. Attendees showed a clear understanding of the difference between this process and the existing system, and articulated similar democratic values to those observed in Newcastle. However, the more direct challenge to the system elicited an equivalent state response, including some quite direct expressions of what we might call ‘elitist’ democratic values. This context affected the attempt to establish an alternative democratic experience in at least two ways. Firstly, it created a dynamic in which public sector PB activists, instead of facing outwards to citizens, focused on ‘making the case’ to the state (with an associated felt need to present the work as ‘unpolitical’). Secondly, and more dramatically, the open opposition of the state resulted in the termination of the programme. Bradford therefore illustrates how serious attempts to bring about a democratic alternative can run up against the UK system’s underlying values.

Chapter 10 concludes that an important element of the democratic deficit consists in the gulf between citizen democratic values and the reality they encounter in the current UK system. Accordingly, a fruitful avenue for addressing the democratic deficit would be to develop increased opportunities for democratic experiences more informed by egalitarian values. I make the case that this is enabled by taking a ‘citizen-eye view’ rather than an ‘engineer’s-eye view’ of democratic process. However, as I have argued that democracy is a site of struggle between competing ideological traditions, this requires ‘democratic activists’ not merely active democrats, activists who consciously and vigorously join the struggle for a different kind of democracy.

CHAPTER 2

DOING DEMOCRATIC RESEARCH (METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS)

This thesis contrasts two visions of democracy, one which emphasises citizen capacity and one which accords a special status to experts. In attaching value to the idea of citizen capacity, the egalitarian democratic narrative does not negate the role of expertise, but it does imply that expertise in the public realm should enhance rather than undermine citizen knowledge. Thus, a Porto Alegrean PB facilitator described how, as much as possible, 'technical expertise was to be made subservient to the popular mandate, and not the other way round' (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2014:37). A belief in citizen capacity can therefore be said to have methodological implications for research. While we may judge different approaches to research to be suitable in different contexts, my aim in this process has been to strive for some coherence between my subject and my methods, in other words, to try and research democracy democratically.

I have endeavoured to incorporate the idea of citizen capacity in this research process in two significant ways. Firstly, as I discuss below, knowledge about the social world is constructed out of different voices, experiences and perceptions. One aspect of democratic research is therefore to appropriately acknowledge the citizen contribution to knowledge creation. Accordingly, in order to enable the research to benefit from the experiential and practical knowledge and insights of the UK PB community, I chose a methodology which allowed for the extended involvement of research participants: case studies supplemented by sustained engagement with PB practitioners at the national level. I used participant observation and in-depth interviews, and included opportunities for participant reflection about the research.

Secondly, research plays a part in the ongoing public conversation about how we live. This places an emphasis on democratic research as both useful (in terms of outcomes and appropriate questions) and useable (*knowing* matters as well as knowledge). In this view, the process of research can have a significant value alongside that of the knowledge it generates; arguably, this impacts on how we might understand 'good' or successful research. Later in this chapter, I consider the extent to which my approach to research has been successful in generating outcomes beyond a contribution to knowledge-creation.

This methodology is rooted in the notion that research is not neutral, but an action in the world which has consequences. Over recent decades many researchers have written about the political and situated nature of research (see Law, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003b; Reason, 1994; Haraway, 1988; Heron, 1981). This position has moved from the margins to generate serious debates in the literature. We begin to see others writing in defence of 'scientific and neutral' social research, a position that might previously have been assumed rather than defended (Ristock & Pennell, 1996:4, see also Burawoy, 2009; Pawson, 2006; Hammersley, 2000). While these debates are well-documented elsewhere, in this chapter I briefly set out the assumptions and values which underpin my own approach, considering both the nature of knowledge and the purpose of research. I discuss how these inform my methodology of sustained 'observant participant' engagement across two case studies, outline the methods I have used, and reflect on their strengths and limitations.

RESEARCH AS A DEMOCRATIC INTERVENTION: VALUES AND ASSUMPTIONS

I have suggested that knowledge about the social world is constructed out of 'different voices, experiences and perceptions'. Drawing on John Heron's much referenced discussion of different 'ways of knowing', this implies more than the plain fact that human experiences are the raw data of social research. Heron suggests four types of knowledge: experiential (knowledge through lived experience), presentational (shaping experience into a communicable form such as art, dance or poetry), propositional (knowledge *about* things: the conceptual form of knowledge recognised by academia) and practical (knowing how to do something) (Heron, 1981; 1988; 1996; Heron & Reason, 2008).

Heron's theory explicitly recognises that knowledge is not the sole preserve of scientists. In this view, researchers are co-creators of knowledge, bringing one form of knowledge (propositional) to the knowledge-creation process, or, as Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln suggest (2003b:634-5), 'jacks-of-all-trades' piecing together a research bricolage out of the available stories and materials, in order to help in the ongoing, collective task of society-building. This contrasts with the view that (neutral) researchers 'contribute to a developing body of knowledge whose likely validity is greater than that of lay ideas' (Hammersley, 2000:141), and presents the possibility that participants may be able to make a greater contribution to the research process than as informants alone.

This perspective on the nature of knowledge incorporates the understanding that knowledge is not only a 'product' but a process (of knowing, of meaning-making). In other words, people co-create their reality through participation (see, for example, Reason, 1998:262; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002:18; Greenwood & Levin, 1998:82; Ristock & Pennell, 1996:4). This emphasises the identity of the knower. Where knowledge as object is stand-alone, knowing is a conduit between the individual and the world. Knowledge as object has value, but it is given life when a person connects it to the world. This view accords with a radical historicism which emphasises contingency (the view that social processes depend on choices made and agency exercised by the particular individuals involved) (see Bevir, 2010:5-7). Research, through understanding people's choices and the consequences of those choices, allows us to explore what might be possible, arguably, to explore alternative futures.[1] Therefore, knowledge as process, as understanding, could be considered a goal of research alongside knowledge as 'product'. This does not diminish the importance of what is known, but also focuses attention on who knows it (and – given Heron's broader conception of ways of knowing – how).

All this is not, of course, to say that day-to-day understanding is the same as academic analysis. Zygmunt Bauman describes sociological knowledge as having four essential characteristics: 'responsible speech' (claims are made only where there is understood to be evidence), the size of the field (drawing on experiences beyond your own), the effort to 'make sense' (looking beyond individual intentions to the underlying web of human interdependency) and the attempt to de-familiarise the familiar (look beyond our taken-for-granted assumptions about what we know) (Bauman, 1990:12-15). An academic approach clearly can add value to the process of interpreting our reality. Critically, however, these characteristics are not (and should not be) the sole preserve of social scientists. This is fundamental to democratising research endeavours. As Bauman (1990:16) argues: 'sociological thinking is a power in its own right, an anti-fixating power; it renders flexible again the world hitherto oppressive in its apparent fixity.' Likewise, Paolo Freire (1972) links people's

[1] This approach echoes Appreciative Inquiry (AI), which starts off with an idea of the future based on 'what works', in order to explore ways in which this can be developed further; AI's 'anticipatory principle' suggests that the way people think about the future will shape the way they move towards that future (Reed, 2007:27).

ability to analyse oppression in their own lives with their ability to challenge it, and to effect change.

This understanding of knowledge and knowing implies associated research values, in that it foregrounds both the potential impact of research on participants, and the need to justify social research in terms of its purpose. In this view, a right to research is not assumed. In contrast, the postgraduate research textbook I was directed to as a new graduate student suggested that such a right exists in tension with the rights of research subjects:

> ‘In many cases, social scientists face a conflict between two rights: the right to research and to acquire knowledge and the right of individual research participants to self-determination, privacy and dignity.’ (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992:78)

The implication is that ethical considerations are introduced as a constraint on otherwise unlimited academic research freedom. However, if we understand knowledge to be a process, it is impossible to conceive of research – or researchers – as neutral. The goal of research is not to disinterestedly uncover the truth; rather, researchers are ‘knowers’ too, and we ‘know’ from a particular standpoint and in a particular way. The idea that the researcher stands outside their field of study, seeing everything from nowhere, is an impossible ‘god-trick’ (Haraway, 1991:189) which masks our responsibility for the consequences and uses of our research, and our own authorship of the particular ‘findings’ we create. As John Law argues:

> ‘Since social (and natural) science investigations interfere with the world … things change as a result – the issue, then, is not to seek disengagement, but rather with how to engage.’ (Law, 2004:7)

Thus, researchers who embrace a process-focused approach do so because we understand social research to have consequences, to be value-laden. Importantly, this does not mean biased (as has sometimes been implied, see Hammersley, 2000). Rejecting the possibility of neutrality does not mean rejecting a commitment to one’s own relationship with truth – in other words to honesty and integrity. It does, however, mean that social research is not a precise science, but an action in the world, a contribution to the ongoing

conversation of who we are and how we live. It is an intervention, and has tangible outcomes in terms of social change, which can be positive or negative.

This is important because it suggests that the burden of proof should not rest with the case to limit research. Rather, active responsibility rests with the researcher to make a social and ethical (rather than purely academic) case for research. It is not enough to assume that because the topic researched is important that the research itself is important. Returning to my postgraduate textbook, rather than assuming a right to research, the researcher should perhaps justify research not *against* the rights of participants but in terms of their or other stakeholders' rights or well-being. Importantly, if the case for research is made explicit rather than assumed, this can also help democratise the research process, as it facilitates debate over justifications for research.

In this vein, there is a high level of awareness amongst participatory researchers of the potential negative impact of research, perhaps most dramatically captured by Reason and Rowan's 'hatred and horror about what traditional research does to those it studies [and] those who do the research' (Reason & Rowan, 1981:xii). This is supported by the familiar sense of 'consultation-fatigue' experienced by the much-researched, which is arguably not an outcome of being over-researched, but of the distrust and powerlessness associated with research which doesn't impact on the things that participants want to change (Milne *et al*, 2008:5).

More positively, many participatory researchers reflect on gains additional to formal research findings. To give a very brief and eclectic flavour of broader outcomes, collaborative research with indigenous Australians resulted in participants' increased reflection and work on their own priorities (Mayo *et al*, 2009:137); workshops for a participatory action research process in Guatemala unexpectedly evolved into constituted women's organisations (Schrader McMillan, 2007:526); victims of state violence in Northern Ireland 'regained a sense of control over their own experiences and memories' through proactive engagement in action research (Lundy & McGovern, 2006:59-60), and, from my own experience, encounters within a collaborative research project on Bradford and Keighley's so-called 'White' estates had practical outcomes including new youth activities across divided communities (Pearce & Milne, 2010:28-29).

Thus, and in keeping with a view of research as an active process of knowing, Lincoln & Denzin (2000:1055) suggest that we judge research processes 'pragmatically, by the conversations they invite, the empathy they generate, the action they start'. This has clear implications for how research is conducted. It focuses attention on the difference it makes, rather than simply the quality of the research findings. Moreover, it suggests a focus on collective elements of research design, in order to facilitate 'conversations', 'empathy' and 'action' (or social outcomes however defined). Methodologically then, there is a value to researchers reflecting on how research generates tangible outcomes, and seeking to incorporate this in research design.[2]

In the following section, I discuss how I have considered these factors in relation to my research on participatory budgeting in the UK.

PROCESS-FOCUSED RESEARCH: METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The initial methodological implication of a process-focused approach to research is that, if methods are designed with the intention of generating aims including but not limited to the creation of knowledge, there needs to be clarity about these wider aims. As I have mentioned, I come to this research as a democratic activist. I want to understand the UK democratic environment better because I believe the democratic deficit matters. More specifically, I want to contribute to resourcing democratic activists (including myself), via an iterative understanding of our context, with the hope that we can learn more about what approaches might generate particular outcomes (for example, a more democratically active culture).

PB in the UK is notable for the aspirations of its proponents, many of whom articulate a desire to radically improve democracy. Practitioners and activists consciously seek to establish processes which have the potential to generate the kinds of democratic outcomes claimed for PB internationally. Accordingly, they have an appetite for learning and development. Embedded research undertaken with and alongside this community has the potential to support practitioners and activists through exploring how particular processes connect

[2] While there are some points of coherence between this approach and the current UK Research Council 'impact' agenda, for example, in terms of encouraging researchers to think in terms of who might benefit from research projects, the emphasis on 'end users' does still suggest a primary focus on impact from the 'knowledge-product' of research, rather than a more democratic and process-oriented methodology (see RCUK, 2014).

with democratic outcomes. This entails an increased understanding of assumptions and perspectives about democracy. One of the reasons I chose PB as a lens through which to explore the issue of the democratic deficit was precisely because there is a shared interest in the question of how to build an appetite for democracy. As a result, I was able to collaborate with partners who believed the research had the potential to support their democratic goals.

Accordingly, and in keeping with the democratic research values discussed above, I aimed for a research process which facilitated the inclusion of democratic activists' analysis, voices and experience, allowing practical and experiential knowledge to be brought together with academic (propositional) knowledge, in order to maximise the knowledge and understanding shared and gained.[3] In each case study, I identified key informants who had an active interest in the research, and met with them (either singly or as a group) to invite their research questions as well as their views on the areas of interest I felt were important. Throughout the research, I created ongoing opportunities for joint reflection (again, both through individual conversations and group meetings) on the progress and direction of the research. Their interest being primarily in the empirical UK aspect of the study, I shared findings (and discussed their use) with interested participants in each case study location, and with PB activists at the national level.

A case study approach involving sustained participant observation therefore allowed me to work closely with interlocutors at both local and national level, whose own interest in deepening democracy led them to contribute insights to the research. An ongoing dialogue with research participants strengthens the research because assumptions, hypotheses, research questions and research findings are refined, discussed and 'reality-checked' throughout the process. Accordingly, the research provided a forum for reflection and enhanced awareness which connected directly with the democratic activity of participatory budgeting. This is likely to make the research more 'useful and useable', it being highly likely that increased insights are better facilitated by engagement with a process than by reading about it afterwards.

[3] This is not to suggest that activists and practitioners do not also have propositional knowledge of PB (or, indeed, that academics cannot have experiential or practical knowledge); such divisions are inevitably crude.

This approach was explicitly valued by actors within both case studies. In partnering with an academic researcher, they were seeking an academic perspective, to complement their experiential and practice-based knowledge. They were not looking for evaluation, but critical, empathetic and considered reflection (see Blakey & Jackson, 2010). Just as academics can value a partnership with other forms of knowing, which can ground and reality-check our conceptual understandings, so can reflective practitioners value a thoughtful, academic framework which can contextualise their experiential knowledge. In Newcastle, the opportunity to reflect on conceptual questions (for example the definition and purpose of participatory democracy, relative to representative democracy) was an important part of the research feedback process (see Blakey, 2009:16-17).[4]

This level of involvement is encouraged by an acknowledged sense of shared purpose between researcher and participants: Lavie-Ajayi refers to the importance of having a 'compelling question which participants ... are hungry to answer' (2007:29). Shared goals help build trust, which allows the researcher to become a partner and in a sense a fellow actor, rather than an outside observer. Thus, I would describe the research I undertook as more ‘observant participant’ than ‘participant observer’. While not involved in process delivery or as a participatory budgeting participant, I have been a participant in the sense that I have a (known) position on radical democracy, and a commitment to the ongoing journey and development of PB. I research PB because I want to contribute to its healthy and vital development in the UK, and accordingly I work alongside the community of activists and practitioners who also want to develop and improve PB in the UK.

I believe this increases the potential for the research and the researcher to play a role in debates and discussions within the context that is being researched. As I said, I strongly believe that trust and shared purpose do not undermine academic integrity and critical engagement, or preclude disagreement. Indeed, they can facilitate hearing disagreement. Criticism from a disengaged academic may be easier to dismiss, or more likely to produce a defensive reaction, than

[4] Participant observation record: research findings workshop, 22/09/2009.

critical engagement with a trusted partner.[5] This coheres with the experience of participatory researchers using Appreciative Inquiry, who have found that a positive approach, free from 'censure and blaming', encourages the open discussion of difficulties (Reed, 2007:39).

To give an example of how trust facilitated engagement of this type, sharing a conference paper containing critical reflections with research partners in Bradford led to an honest and fruitful discussion of the issues. This process affected both of our stances, in my case, acknowledging my responsibility for how local critics of the process might use public commentaries, and, in the case of the research partner, reflecting on the process in new ways (particularly in relation to the role of deliberation within PB).[6]

Constructive engagement is supported by a sense of social processes as ongoing journeys. In other words, rather than evaluating a static snapshot of a social process, the research aims to understand what supports actors within the process in moving it closer to their individual visions, which may of course be varied and conflicting (research cannot require you to share a vision with the participants; there are inevitably multiple visions at work in any social process, as my research highlights).[7] Critical reflection is thus offered in a spirit of uniting aims, practice and outcomes, which mitigates against it being received simply as a negative assessment or attack. Thus, shared purpose and trust can play a crucial role in generating positive outcomes from the research.

Taken together, these methodological considerations informed the development of my research methods, which I describe below (I have chosen to present my methods chronologically, to emphasise the collaborative and iterative development of the research, rather than imposing a post-hoc design structure).

My approach: a chronological account

My interest in UK participatory budgeting dates from the very early experiments in Bradford. As a fieldworker for an ESRC funded research project, *Municipal Innovations in Non-governmental Public Participation: UK and Latin America*, I was responsible for selecting a small number of case studies within the city of

[5] Arguably, a strident assertion of academic freedom (to say what you like) at times interferes with paying sufficient attention to the likelihood of people actually hearing what you say (though I am of course in favour of self-reflection, not censorship!).
[6] Participant observation record: Bradford Vision, 11/06/2007.
[7] I discuss this issue in-depth in chapter 8, with reference to the Newcastle PB programme.

Bradford. The study as a whole looked at new forms of urban participation in six cities, three in Latin America: Porto Alegre in Brazil, Medellin in Colombia and Caracas in Venezuela and three in the UK: Salford, Manchester and Bradford. While this study was not specifically about participatory budgeting, it included four examples of PB, Porto Alegre in Brazil, Medellin in Colombia and Salford in the UK, as well as the process I chose to follow in Keighley, a town within Bradford District. I selected the PB pilot because it was, in my view, Bradford's most creative and far-reaching 'municipal innovation', and moreover, was of national importance as one of the earliest PB processes in the country.

While I outline the process itself in chapter 9, I will introduce my main interlocutors here. The key individuals involved in initiating PB in Bradford were paid officers (working for the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), a quasi-autonomous public sector organisation). This reflects the nature of participatory processes in Bradford. The state developed and maintained the key participatory processes and engaged at a strategic level primarily with paid voluntary sector professionals. Community members were involved in the Keighley process as decision-making citizens, but not in a developmental role. As interlocutors, these actors had an interest in the research question and goals, and a sense of shared purpose in terms of democratic motivation. Importantly, they had a consciously political vision (though explicitly not party political) regarding the potential of PB to bring about social and democratic change; they are in this sense 'activists' as well as professionals.

In following the Keighley PB process, I worked closely with a small number of key informants, who I invited to shape the research focus. These research partners were chosen according to their commitment to the goals of the research, and their centrality to the processes being explored. My research relationships with these key actors immeasurably enhanced the research process, and took the form of a series of informal conversations, which both followed and shaped the research process, and which, importantly, were an overtly two-way process. These were supplemented with more formal research reference group meetings which allowed for more collective reflection. Because in the Bradford case, PB was one of two processes explored through the research (the other being the more formal process of Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) representation to the LSP boards), this group also included

informants who have not contributed directly to the research described here. As researcher, I shared my ongoing analysis of the data and invited the analysis, reflection and suggestions of my VCS and LSP colleagues.

The research in Bradford involved, during the course of 2006, approximately 7 months' participant observation (reflecting the life of the PB process) and semi-structured interviews with key informants, as well as the informal conversations with research partners described above. As I have said, a case study approach was essential in enabling the collaborative engagement of key actors with the research. Supplemented by the deeper reflection which is possible within interviews, participant observation facilitated both depth of understanding and breadth of perspective. In addition, it was particularly effective in revealing the synergies and dissonances in stated views, values and practices which emerged as significant in this study (indeed, it has been suggested that this is participant observation's central claim to validity; Gillham, 2008:1).

To this end, I became a member of the Keighley PB reference group, and worked alongside organisers, taking part in planning meetings and supporting the process. The PB pilot timetable coincided with the research timeframe, allowing me a close involvement in the PB development process itself. I proactively sought to ensure that I interviewed the main actors involved from across the spectrum of organisations, viewpoints and roles (in addition, I interviewed anyone connected with the process who expressed interest in sharing their views). It is important to emphasise that the research robustly explored a full range of perspectives and experiences, not only those of my research partners.

Alongside ongoing conversations and 'informal interviews' with key research partners, I conducted 10 semi-structured interviews, involving 2 politicians, 5 statutory officers and 3 VCS officers; and 18 'snapshot' short interviews with PB voting day participants during the event.[8] I attended numerous events, including 7 process planning meetings, 3 community level meetings at which PB was discussed, 3 outreach events (door-to-door and school gate budget consultations), 1 sifting meeting (at which bids to the PB process were considered), 'Keighley Decision Day' and 1 evaluation meeting.

[8] Further details of these interviews are given in Appendix 1.

I conducted an initial thematic analysis of the Bradford data (using Nvivo to support the coding process), based around the needs of the *Municipal Innovations* project, and locally determined questions. These findings were formally returned to and discussed with a wider group of participants via a local workshop at the end of the research process. The findings of the *Municipal Innovations* research have been published as a research briefing for participations *('Here the people decide'? New forms of participation in the city*, Pearce *et al*, 2008) and as an edited volume: *Participation and democracy in the twenty-first century city* (Pearce, 2010).

My involvement with PB in Bradford afforded me an excellent insight into the national development of participatory budgeting in the UK, as I developed close links with the lead voluntary sector organisation in the field, Church Action on Poverty's PB Unit. This was reinforced through a sense of shared goals in relation to strengthening the democratic potential of PB in the UK, and through occasional volunteering with the Unit at events and conferences, and led to more substantial engagement. Between 2007 and the present, my involvement with the UK national PB field has included:

- 2007: support for the first national evaluation, a study hosted by the *Municipal Innovations* research project and undertaken by Kezia Lavan, a member of staff at the PB Unit; her findings are published in the report: *Participatory budgeting in the UK, an evaluation from a practitioner perspective* (Lavan, 2007);
- 2007-2010: membership of the National Participatory Budgeting Reference Group, the purpose of which was to oversee and support the development of PB in the UK (this was hosted by the Department for Communities and Local Government, and included civil servants, PB practitioners and the PB Unit);
- 2009-2010: joint project with the PB Unit's research officer on methods for evaluating PB (for which I undertook 6 single or group interviews with PB practitioners in a variety of locations; this resulted in a participatory self-evaluation tool-kit and a report; Blakey & Jackson, 2009, 2010);
- 2010-2011: evaluation of a programme of 5 PB pilots for the Scottish Parliament (Blakey & Jackson, 2011);

- 2012-2013: membership of PB Network steering group (volunteer-run advocacy network which formed following the closure of the PB Unit).

My participant observation at national level therefore encompasses: attending 5 national reference group meetings, 2 national PB conferences, 2 'Big Society' PB events, 3 events relating to the DCLG funded national evaluation of PB, 2 regional PB events in Yorkshire and the Humber (which I helped organise), and 3 meetings of the PB Network (plus steering group meetings and teleconferences). In addition, I have carried out 6 interviews (with community members, council officers and one councillor) and 4 workshops (one with participation and evaluation stakeholders and 3 with PB practitioners) in relation to the self-evaluation of PB processes. I have had in-depth informal conversations with PB activists and other stakeholders from Eastfield in Scarborough, Tower Hamlets and Manton, all of which are considered to be particularly important examples of PB in the UK context.[9] Finally, I carried out two focus groups with community members and statutory officers in Glenrothes, Scotland. Accordingly, I am well-placed to invite practitioner involvement in the ongoing use and development of my research on PB in the UK (including but not limited to this particular study).

This work has played an immensely valuable role in this research, as through it I have achieved a broad understanding both of the dynamics of individual processes and of the national PB story (including motivations, goals and constraints), which contextualises the cases of Bradford and Newcastle. My extended engagement has led to 'saturation' in a grounded theory sense (to illustrate, I found that what I learned in Scotland cohered strongly with what I had already learned elsewhere). It is worth noting at this point that, while I have been closely involved with PB practice in the UK, my aim is explicitly not to promote or advocate for PB, but rather to understand what might be effective in addressing the democratic deficit (I believe an uncritical attachment to a particular approach limits rather than strengthens this endeavour).

Through my knowledge of the UK PB scene, I selected Newcastle as my primary case study for this research (to be supplemented by the Bradford case). Both are interesting as early examples of UK PB processes, in which actors

[9] Eastfield has a high level of community control and input. Tower Hamlets is the largest single example of PB in the UK, dispersing 1.2 million pounds of the core council budget over 2 years. Manton has documented the connection between PB and mainstream voting behaviour.

were consciously creating new democratic systems; therefore both offer a lens on democratic assumptions and values. Both were also strongly committed to learning about PB and developing its potential, with key actors centrally engaged with the PB activist / practitioner community at national level. As a result, the model used in these cities has been developmentally significant in relation to PB elsewhere in the UK, indeed has arguably become typical (though it is important to note that the UK PB field is marked by significant local variation). Finally, both areas were actively interested in developing their work through research, an essential requirement for my research methodology.

However, because my approach is based on the view that research can make visible a narrative which helps us to explore what is possible for the future, I believe any of the early locally-developed PB processes would have offered democratic insights. The Bradford and Newcastle processes are two significant examples which offer reflections and stories. They offer a lens to look through, and suggest possibilities.

In Newcastle, as in Bradford, my methods included sustained engagement with key interlocutors, approximately 7 months' participant observation, and semi-structured interviews. During 2008 and 2009, I followed a total of 5 PB processes in Newcastle, two in Newburn ward, two in Denton ward, and one in Walkergate ward. In Denton and Newburn, the U-Decide team (a permanent grouping of council officers housed within the Social Policy Unit) set up citizen working groups to oversee the PB process, supported by officers and to an extent by councillors. I tracked the work of these groups, and that of associated council officers and councillors, during the planning process and event delivery.[10] I provide an overview of the U-Decide programme and the Newburn and Denton processes in chapter 7.

My research partners in Newcastle included the U-Decide team within the Social Policy Unit, and individual citizen working group members who expressed a particular interest in the research. Research planning took place through an initial meeting with the U-Decide team and ongoing conversations in which I sought to understand key actors' areas of interest, and ascertain

[10] The Walkergate process was structured somewhat differently, being aimed at young people. I followed this process in less depth because it didn't have a citizen steering group, but as its timescale coincided with that of the first Denton and Newburn processes, I included it in the research in order to gain a more complete overview of the work of the U-Decide team.

important questions for their work, for example, the question of building support for PB amongst colleagues in other departments. I drew up a research agreement with the U-Decide team, which detailed what we could expect of one another, and undertook to provide a report focused on their areas of interest, as well as verbal feedback. They agreed to facilitate access to other actors within the process and provide introductions. This led to a greater sense of ownership of the research and interest in the findings, as well as providing a 'shortcut' to relationships of trust and openness with others involved in the process. I believe this to be for two reasons. Firstly, the close nature of the working relationships between the U-Decide team and other actors meant their introductions were valuable. Secondly, negotiating process parameters and goals with the U-Decide team made it easier to describe a clear link between the research and useful local outcomes to prospective participants. Through these links, and via 'observant participation', I developed relationships with councillors and members of the citizen steering groups in Denton and Newburn wards.[11]

Alongside ongoing conversations, I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews (including 7 joint or group interviews). These involved a total of 7 politicians, 7 statutory officers and 15 citizens. In addition, I conducted 34 'snapshot' short interviews with participants at PB voting events.[12] As in Bradford, these reflect a full range of views, not only those of research partners (again, I invited people to participate based on their involvement with the programme). In Newcastle, I attended 1 process planning meeting, 2 sifting meetings (at which bids to the PB process were considered), 5 voting events and 7 evaluation meetings. I supported 1 outreach event (a PB roadshow). I volunteered at the events I observed, helping set up venues and clear away, facilitating deliberation when asked, and taking notes.

As in Bradford, I also undertook local dissemination. I produced a research report for U-Decide organisers and participants, which focused on the questions they had identified as developmentally important for the programme (Blakey,

[11] Interestingly, I found a more consistently positive response towards my own needs as a student researcher from community members than as a paid academic from paid professionals. An occasionally sceptical undertone (from the latter) that academics gain professional benefit from practitioners' work was frequently replaced by a desire to assist me in gaining a qualification. Community members on more than one occasion voiced the hope I had 'got what I needed for my course'. This is in keeping with a desire for a tangible outcome from the efforts and time they have contributed to the research. This suggests that such outcomes don't have to be self-interested, but reinforces the view that they should be evident to research participants.
[12] More detail on these interviews is provided in Appendix 1.

2009), and held a workshop to share and discuss findings with a wider group of research participants. This provided an additional opportunity for all key actors in the processes I followed (not only research partners) to discuss the research.

Again as in Bradford, local dissemination in Newcastle was based on a first round of thematic data analysis, addressing the research questions of interest to participants in Newcastle, and supplemented by an inductive process of analysis. In addition to generating locally useful findings, this process clarified my own theoretical questions. Centrally, the first round of data analysis focused my attention on democratic traditions because it was evident that different actors brought widely different democratic assumptions and values to the process. It also crystallised the role of Porto Alegre within the research narrative, being not only the inspiration for PB in the UK (as I had previously characterised its role in this research), but also as illustrative of the egalitarian democratic tradition (complementing a review of the UK system, which both enabled a consideration of the nature of the democratic deficit and illustrated the representative narrative). Thus the data led me to in-depth theoretical analysis, not vice versa. In this sense, my approach to the case studies was primarily *intrinsic* (making sense of each 'within its own world'), and only subsequently *instrumental* (illustrating how wider concerns are manifest in the case) (Stake, 2003:140-141).

Following a more focused engagement with the relevant literatures, I returned to the data with an enhanced theoretical understanding, to explore the emergent questions more deeply. I conducted a second round of thematic analysis on the data collected in both case studies, based on the categories generated through my initial analysis and subsequent reading and thinking. I then reviewed each code created for patterns and exceptions across different groups of actors (highlighting, for example, the particular role played by the 'experienced reps' in the Denton case study). I was therefore able to select illustrative quotes which either epitomised the views of a larger group, or another significant perspective.

The final (ongoing) stage of the research process has been to bring my analysis back to the UK PB activist-practitioner community, for 'reality-checking' and continuing discussion. This has included sharing the 4 UK PB chapters with key practitioners, who (I was delighted to hear) felt my analysis captured the

psychology of the situation, suggested new ways of thinking, and would hopefully be of use in building work on PB in the future.

Strengths and limitations of a process-focused methodology

Engaging key research participants in the research process meant that insights from the research could be fed directly into discussions about how the PB process worked. For example, in Newcastle, when officers were developing steering group guidelines in response to live issues with representation and representativeness I reflected with them on relevant issues emerging within the research. In this, I didn't shape the process directly, but was able to act as a 'communication resource', sharing an (anonymised) range of views, alongside my own observations. This included raising questions about how participants were selected and observations about when steering group members were treated as representing the community (given that it was felt to be problematic that they *acted* as representing the community). Thus the research continuously fed back into real-life activities, as well as being shaped by the analysis of key informants. Together we developed a shared understanding of the questions we were all exploring – they in their work and me in my research.

In a similar vein, collective elements of the research facilitated enhanced shared learning between actors (as well as providing reflective, nuanced data for the research). For example, semi-structured group interviews in Newcastle allowed community members to explore ideas they felt to be important about the PB process (in both wards, focus-group members independently came up with the idea of developing ward-wide projects to be funded through PB, as an alternative to competing for small grants). In Bradford, the research reference group offered a collective setting which allowed different views of both the research and the participatory processes being researched to be shared and discussed. This included international learning and sharing, with visiting Latin American researchers from the *Municipal Innovations* project discussing participation, activists and the role of civil society organisations with UK practitioners and activists.

Importantly, process benefits were increased because I organised research feedback around locally determined questions, rather than according to the wider focus of my research. In Bradford this occurred as part of the Municipal

Innovations process, via the report '*Here, the people decide'? New forms of participation in the city* (Pearce *et al*, 2008). This was written for our research partners and participants, and shared and discussed at a one-day event in Bradford (as well as at similar events in Latin America). In Newcastle, I held a workshop to introduce, discuss and finalise my report, *"People taking control"* (Blakey, 2009). This was well attended by officers and community members. This approach again meant that research findings directly reached the people who could use them in developing the PB programme locally.

Two reactions underlined for me the effectiveness of working with local actors on research design and dissemination. One officer from Newcastle's permanent U-Decide team was particularly struck by a table in the report which juxtaposed officers', community members' and councillors' understandings of their own and one another's roles and responsibilities in relation to PB (Blakey, 2009:18). She said she suddenly understood how conflicts had unexpectedly appeared out of seemingly harmonious processes.[13] I believe that local trust in the research (generated by attention to process) meant that these findings were heard and used. Thus, a senior officer commented that of all the research done on their work, this was the first time he felt the researcher fully understood what they were trying to do.[14] It is important to stress that this did not mean the findings were wholly uncritical; rather it reflects a level of trust in the research which meant that challenging findings were heard and considered. I firmly believe this not to be simply a comment on the quality of this or other work, but related to the fact that I was exploring their questions, as well as my own.[15]

This is of course a mutually beneficial process, as these conversations feed back into the research planning, data and analysis. My approach deliberately created spaces in which key actors probed my thinking and the direction of the research, and raised questions about ongoing PB processes. In terms of the robustness of the findings, relations of trust can lead to the breakdown of initial caution, generating more honest reflection, of value to both participants and to

[13] Participant observation record: research findings workshop, 22/09/2009.
[14] Participant observation record: research findings workshop, 22/09/2009.
[15] Though it is perhaps worthy of note that during the period I spent with the U-Decide team, no less than 5 other researchers gathering data for research on PB came and went, some spending as little as one half-day with local actors. On one occasion, I was strongly aware of other observers' lack of context in how they understood the events they witnessed during their short visit (participant observation record: Grand Voting Event, Denton, 29/11/2008).

the research. To illustrate, partway through a thoughtful conversation about some of the ongoing issues within the programme, a council officer remarked that she had just remembered my role as researcher, and that it made her think about things in a different way.[16] As I reflected at the time:

> '*You need participants to trust you and this can only be achieved by working alongside them, by a sense of shared objectives. People are very defensive at first – those with most invested anyway – even if they are interested in the research. They treat you as judge and jury, and are very careful to present 'negative' examples in a particular light. It's so important to work on <u>why</u> you want to explore things, and for people to understand that this is within a supportive and constructive framework*.'[17]

Furthermore, an engaged methodology requires researchers to justify findings to people who know the context. This acts as a reality-check for developing theory as well as for researchers' understanding of the data. While the variety of views held by different actors means it is highly unlikely everyone will agree, it is an opportunity to ensure that findings 'make sense' to those involved (to put it another way, findings must at least take account of their lived experience).

It is important to note here that I am in no way suggesting that more conventionally conceived methodologies can't or don't deliver process benefits. Self-evidently, research can generate useful findings and outcomes whether conceived of as process-focused or 'knowledge-product' focused. Furthermore, in distinguishing between process-focused and product-focused research I have clearly sketched a false dichotomy for the purposes of exploring a methodological approach. Good research of all kinds includes attention to elements which I would conceptualise as process-focused, such as the quality of research relationships and the extent of participant engagement with the research. The point I wish to make here is simply that these factors are perhaps not always accorded sufficient recognition with regard to their role in generating positive research outcomes.

Naturally, my approach also had its share of challenges and limitations. In Bradford, while my ongoing relationships undoubtedly shaped the research

[16] Participant observation record: Community Development Unit, 28/11/2008.
[17] Participant observation record: 29/11/2008.

design and development in positive ways, the impact in terms of broader research ownership was more limited than in Newcastle. I believe this to be for two main reasons. Firstly, the research was one case in a set of six cities; accordingly, the parameters of the research questions were (though flexible) fairly well defined. Moreover, there was a parallel collective process between the six field workers and the principal investigator; the greater familiarity with the research and closer engagement of this group meant that it inevitably had a greater impact on the overall research direction (this did also bring positive local outcomes, including as I have mentioned cross-case learning, in particular the international exchanges around PB which the research facilitated).

Secondly, unless a more actively participatory research process is followed (which lay outside the design of the wider research project), it can be hard to overcome prior conceptions of conventional research approaches. Even amongst my key research partners, I was more than once surprised to come across the implicit expectation that my support for their work through non-academic dissemination or by encouraging use of the findings was at least partially motivated by the desire to acquire additional data.[18] In reality, though these processes do often provide further insights, I consider this secondary. I view working in partnership throughout the whole life of the research as essential to the case for doing the research. The occasional preconceptions I encountered highlight the popular (and at times justified) view that academic research is essentially extractive, not interactive. My learning from this case study, and the greater freedom enabled by working more independently, informed my research design in the Newcastle case.

While building good ongoing research relationships was an explicit aim within my research methodology, this brought its own dilemmas. When working in situations where there were conflicts or opposing views, it was at times a challenge to ensure that all actors continued to trust that I was equally open to their perspective. While moving closer to being an ‘observant participant’ can bring important benefits in terms of trust and willingness to engage with more critical findings, the expectation (or, more accurately, realisation) that as a researcher you have a view is perhaps acknowledged more openly or earlier. This might otherwise occur only at the point of dissemination. At one level, I

[18] Participant observation record: Bradford Vision, 05/12/2006.

believe this simply to bring into the open an inevitable dimension of all research. I have argued that all knowledge is positioned, context-dependent and intrinsically linked to the identity of the knower. However, it is clear that just as a sense of shared purpose impacts positively on trust and engagement, a sense of dissonant perspectives can have a correspondingly negative impact. This can impact negatively on the quality of the research to the extent to which it causes research participants to feel increased defensiveness or distrust, and therefore to reduce engagement.

This may be characterised as a tension between personal openness and honesty (participation) and communicative openness to all views (observation). I tried to mitigate this in two ways. Firstly, I found it helpful to have clarity on my role as a communication resource, rather than as a neutral observer. As researchers, we consciously aim to hear a comprehensive range of available voices and perspectives. Reflecting these through the research process can allow us to play a useful role in increasing shared understanding. Secondly, I sought to maintain a focus on the shared aims which were agreed in advance through the research process, and relate the exploration of a range of views to these shared aims. Furthermore, as a researcher rather than an embedded actor, it was inevitable that a certain distance remained. It was clear that my role was supporting and observing rather than contributing to decision-making; the line between 'participant observer' and 'observant participant' was thus never fully crossed. This was helpful in terms of ensuring that I was seen to be open to all views.

Embedded and multi-dimensional research relationships also raise an ethical issue, in that the research process becomes more organic and open-ended; in other words, less distinctly defined for participants. I addressed this by actively working to keep my identity as a researcher present in people's minds throughout my involvement, and, where necessary, through anonymising the 'voices' (easily recognisable by fellow participants unless care is taken) as well as formal identities of participants.[19] In addition, I believe that the participatory nature of the research mitigates against the extremes of 'invasive' observation

[19] I do believe the research to be fundamentally ethical, in that it takes seriously the aspirations and goals of research participants, and does not subordinate these to an externally determined research aim.

research, where ‘subjects’ are more passively involved (see Gillham, 2008:91-98; Adler & Adler, 1998:100-104).

A further issue with my approach was the difficulty of equally involving actors who have different levels of engagement with PB. In the case of both Newcastle and Bradford, while councillors at times had limited engagement with the delivery of the PB processes (this was certainly not true in every case), I considered them to be an important voice in terms of PB’s overall democratic potential. In Bradford, this dynamic was repeated with community members, who were involved in PB as participants but tended not to have a sense of ownership of the process because they were not invited to share in process design and delivery. The problem this posed for my approach was that, because I aimed to build deeper research relationships based on shared purpose and aims, it was difficult to achieve equal levels of engagement from people who did not have the same ownership of the process being researched.

This was not a problem with regard to formal data collection (for example, I found that most councillors were very willing to give interviews), but it did limit process benefits from the research. For example, the dissemination workshop in Newcastle was well attended by both officers and community members, but no councillors were present. Of course, this does not mean that councillors were not involved in such conversations elsewhere, simply that, to the extent that the research process was able to increase these reflective spaces, an important voice (unsurprisingly, the one that is also least present within delivery discussions) was missing.

Overall, however, I believe these are limits to the extent to which I was able to increase ownership and voice within the research, rather than ways in which my chosen methodology detracted from ownership and voice, relative to a less engaged methodology. As with any social process, research is a journey, not a snapshot. The attempt to foreground research process alongside the creation of a knowledge-product can make a contribution in bringing us closer to the goal of engaged, useful and used research.

CONCLUSION

In this research, two geographical case studies supplemented by national engagement provide a lens on the development and practice of PB in the UK. The methodology I have used to undertake this research process has generated significant local learning, reflected in a number of reports aimed at practitioners which help connect research findings with local PB development outcomes (Pearce *et al*, 2008; Blakey, 2009; see also Blakey & Jackson, 2010; Blakey & Jackson, 2011) and a PB self-evaluation tool-kit which translates learning into a more practical form (Blakey & Jackson, 2009).

The research has also generated academic findings, which are grounded in experiential knowledge, and which form the basis of this study (see also Blakey, 2008; 2010; 2011). A partnership does not require us to devalue conceptual, academic forms of knowing. Indeed, it explicitly encourages all of us, academics and practitioners, to place a clear value on both kinds of knowing. This can be counter-cultural, both in a practice setting which can sometimes regard academia as extractive and out of touch, and consequently not always useful, and in an academic setting which has at times been guilty of promoting a hierarchy of knowledge, in which academic knowledge is assumed to be more valid than other forms. It is not easy to overcome these dynamics, and I have of course only partially succeeded in doing so. However, I believe that the attempt can help us act as reflective, engaged researchers, with a contribution to make to processes of change.

In the next chapter, I begin the story of this research with the conceptual terrain that the democratic narratives I witnessed in Newcastle led me to – the construction of democratic meaning.

CHAPTER 3

DEMOCRATIC 'TRUTHS' IN THE MAKING

You would be forgiven for thinking that democracy is not a contested concept, so prevalent is the view that the Western liberal representative system equals democracy. Fukuyama famously declared our times to be 'the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government' (Fukuyama, 1989:4). Whilst history has tempestuously proved him wrong, there remains an unprecedented standardization of what is publicly recognised as 'democracy'.[1] The definition used by Freedom House to 'measure' democracy is narrow and specific, and captures what the vast majority in the West have been led to recognise as democracy:

> 'Political systems whose leaders are elected in competitive multi-party and multi-candidate processes in which opposition parties have a legitimate chance of attaining power or participating in power.' (Freedom House, 1999)

Across the political spectrum, other modern definitions are remarkably similar. Schumpeter, a defender of elite power, defined the democratic method as 'that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote' (Schumpeter, 1943:269) while Ralph Miliband, a fierce critic of the capitalist democratic state, defined it as 'political competition on a more-than-one party basis, the right of opposition, regular elections, representative assemblies, civic guarantees and other restrictions on the use of state power, etc.' (Miliband, 1969:21). Unsurprisingly, Margaret Thatcher was still more reductive in what she chose to celebrate about democracy. Where Schumpeter and Miliband either prescribed or observed (a crucial distinction) a limited role for the citizen who delegates rather than exercises power in modern democracies, she highlighted 'tolerance, respect for the law and for the impartial administration of justice, and respect for private property' as the key values for parliamentary democracy, over any mention of citizen power (Thatcher, 1988).

[1] Despite, of course, the extensive variety of conceptions of democracy that are core to democratic scholarship; Saward (2003:144-151) provides what he calls a 'selective list' of 34.

This twentieth century narrowing of mainstream definitions of democracy illustrates a purposeful contraction of the public character of democracy, which has formerly been more openly contested and debated. John Dunn reminds us in his history *Setting the people free: the story of democracy* that the health of Athenian democracy lay not least in their disagreements over what it was and what form it should take (Dunn, 2005:31). This suggests that to revive our moribund democracy, rather than signing up more people to this narrow vision, we need to reclaim the terrain of contesting democracy, to assert our different visions because they make a difference to the kind of society that ensues.

Critically, today's dominant understanding of democracy is no convergence of disparate ideas from varied places, which might reasonably have suggested Fukuyama's 'end of history' thesis. Rather, it is the purposeful and global success of a hegemonising idea, a particular and narrow definition of democracy which links the legitimising force of collective public action invoked by the word democracy to a very specific set of practices and beliefs, which, as I explore in this chapter, are intimately connected with elite control and capitalist social organisation, the 'order of egoism', in Buonarroti's terms.

This narrative is associated with an economic view of social well-being, and is linked to a primarily individualistic view of human nature, a view of the state as safeguarding liberty, property and trade, equality as formal (equal opportunities, which is in essence a defence of inequality) and freedom as the individual capacity to act without constraint. In contrast, the narrative of equality is rooted in a sense of the potential in human nature for cooperation and collectivity. Accordingly, it suggests a view of the state's primary function as advancing human happiness, equality as substantive (a claim to reduce material inequality) and freedom as a concern with human flourishing which requires us to tackle the constraints of birth, injustice and inequality.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's description of the views of subjects against those of citizens chimes very much with these two narratives, and for the most part remains strikingly pertinent today:

> 'Subjects extol the public tranquillity, citizens the liberty of individuals; the former prefer security of possessions, the latter, that of persons; the former are of the opinion that the best government is the most severe,

> the latter maintain that it is the mildest; the one party wish that crimes should be punished and the other that they should be prevented … the one party are satisfied when money circulates, the other party demand that the people should have bread.' (Rousseau, 1762:84)

Actually existing democracies are an accommodation between these two orientations, between an elite and a people, each representing a competing claim to power. They are the outcome of specific historical struggles by real actors with particular agendas, between multifaceted elites broadly defending the status quo and a kaleidoscope of revolutionaries struggling for social change (democratic change being generally associated with moments of struggle between entrenched privilege and power and uprisings for greater equality and justice). Thus Dunn, who describes how Athenian democracy operated as a means of containing the land hunger of the poor, refers to the 'winning offer' from rulers to ruled, which is not fixed but endlessly renegotiated, combining the minimum recognition of claimed rights with extensive protection of the social order which keeps the elite in power (Dunn, 2005:146).

In history, there have been key moments which have clearly shaped our democratic thought and practice, and which embody the struggles between these two broad orientations, none more significant than the late eighteenth century. The American and French Revolutions gave us the language and issues which have shaped our democratic present, and they embody the struggle between the narrative of individual self-interest, which claimed the banner of democracy during the American Revolution, and the narrative of equality, which claimed it during the French Revolution.

Crucially, what happened in that turbulent era which began with the new hope of the American Revolution, and perhaps symbolically ended in the crushing defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871, is that democracy, historically associated with substantive equality, underwent a transformation. It began the era as an atrocious idea associated with mob rule and disorder (in the minds of Europe's monarchist elites, at least), flowered briefly in the confidence and optimism of two new nations, but during that age of revolutions (Hobsbawm, 1975) the newly emerging elites redefined it in such a way as to make it at last an acceptable bed-fellow for substantive inequality. In so doing, they appropriated

a fresh reserve of political power at a moment when the historical sources of power and legitimacy which sustained their predecessors (aristocracy and divine right) were on the wane.

Importantly, we can thus observe that the anodyne definition of democracy that history has bequeathed us, as representative not participatory, structure not activity, has had a relatively short existence. Throughout history, democracy has been more often associated with radical ideas and social unrest, democrats being commonly viewed as 'dangerous and subversive mob agitators' as late as the early nineteenth century (Williams, 1963:14). Before the 1848 'year of revolutions', democracy was associated with socialism or communism by actors from right across the political spectrum; thus it was widely accepted that there was an intimate connection between democracy and equality (Christopherson, 1966:295). This history shines through in today's counter-hegemonic understandings of democracy, which place the democratic citizen centre-stage.

José, a Participatory Budgeting activist from Porto Alegre, doesn't '*believe in any revolution which doesn't start with conscious, aware citizens*', and stresses that democracy means the oversight of collective public action, not just making demands (Bruce, 2004:16). Likewise, the Zapatista revolutionaries in Mexico, who struggle not for democracy alone but for 'democracy, liberty and justice', pay tribute to the history on which they build:

> 'We then began encouraging the autonomous rebel zapatista municipalities; which is how the peoples are organized in order to govern and to govern themselves; in order to make themselves stronger. This method of autonomous government was not simply invented by the EZLN, but rather it comes from several centuries of indigenous resistance and from the zapatistas' own experience. It is the self-governance of the communities. In other words, no one from outside comes to govern, but the peoples themselves decide, among themselves, who governs and how, and, if they do not obey, they are removed. If the one who governs does not obey the people, they pursue them, they are removed from authority, and another comes in.'
> (6th Communique of the EZLN, 2005)

Both these understandings of democracy begin with the citizen, not with the government. From this viewpoint, it is no surprise to observe that the democratic rights we have now were not the disinterested gift of the ruling classes, as Fukuyama disingenuously suggested when he argued that 'the habits of democratic contestation and compromise, where the rights of the losers are carefully protected, were more readily learned first by a small, elite group with similar social backgrounds and inclinations, than by a large and heterogeneous society' (Fukuyama, 1992:219) but are the consequence of working class struggles for justice (Engler, 2010:16). This is a significant historical association for radical democrats today, and one that today's elites have a corresponding interest in forgetting. Predictably, this history has been obscured rather than celebrated. The redefinition of democracy and the essential severing of its connection to equality is a victory for liberalism and capitalism.

In this vein, democracy today is often presented (by defenders of the status quo at least) as ahistorical, resting on something immutable, on a fixed 'human nature' (see for example, Masters, 1989; Fukuyama, 1992). As Bookchin (1989:29) puts it, 'the trick of every ruling elite from the beginnings of history to modern times has been to identify its socially created hierarchical systems of domination with community life as such, with the result that human-made institutions acquire divine or biological sanction'. Thus, they are made to appear unchallengeable. It is the conscious hegemonic project of the powerful that we believe the 'folklore of the new generation', as Bauman describes neoliberal myths about society and humanity (Bauman, 1998:71-2).[2]

However, as antifoundationalist Richard Rorty points out:

> ''Human nature', 'rationality', and 'morality' are abbreviations for the kinds of human conduct we wish to encourage. To say that a certain course of conduct is more in accord with human nature or our moral sense, or more rational, than another is just a fancy way of commending one's own sense of what is most worth preserving in our present practices, or commending our own utopian vision of our community' (Rorty, 1996:334)

[2] I will explore this idea further in the following chapter.

Through this lens, the tendency of much modern democratic theory to present democracy as an apolitical structure rather than a struggle between two very political and value-laden visions, takes on a dangerous hue. This approach risks rendering invisible the values and agenda inherent in the liberal, capitalist model of democracy (that we all too often understand to *be* democracy). This terrain matters because how we collectively conceive of democracy, whether it is as a supposedly neutral structure or as an action – a claim to power, shapes the reality of our political processes and structures, and thus affects the ways in which (and extent to which) we are able to act as a citizenry, as a demos. Our conceptions of democracy shape our ability and capacity to act democratically; as a result they fundamentally shape our social reality.

Throughout history, actors have fought with their words, actions, and lives for the meaning of democracy, for a definition or conception which would facilitate the kind of state and society that each hoped to achieve. Accordingly, in this chapter (as throughout the study) I focus on the writings of activist-theorists in order to uncover the close relationship between democratic theory and practice. It is the historically contingent outcomes of these very concrete contests for meaning which explain how we ended up here, where the word democracy, under whose banner rebels and revolutionaries have marched through history, has come to be synonymous with the electoral preservation in power of a social and economic elite.

My aim in this chapter is not to provide an overview of democratic history, but simply to illustrate how commonly taken-for-granted (in the West at least) 'truths' about democracy are in fact historically contingent, rather than fixed and inevitable, and to make visible the underlying values and goals which inform prevalent Western assumptions. The ratification of the American Constitution over the winter of 1787/88 offers a clear illustration of how such 'truths' were once passionately debated (I will also take a brief look at British developments in the same period, later in the chapter).

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: THE TRIUMPH OF COMMERCE, REPRESENTATION, AND THE SOVEREIGN STATE

On the 17th of September 1787, following a unparalleled rejection not only of colonial rule but of monarchical power as divinely ordained, the Federal

Convention of the United States adopted a Constitution which represents the birth of the United States as the first modern self-proclaimed democracy, and which spells out a vision of democracy which has shaped our lives ever since. The next eight months witnessed a fierce and fundamental debate over the very nature of democracy, as each state decided whether or not to ratify the constitution. The case for the Constitution has been captured in the Federalist Papers, 85 essays written with haste, passion and energy by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay, who argue the need for a large, empowered state with a brief for international commerce and the nation's place on a global stage. Crudely, their case is intended to justify as democratically accountable the exercise of power by a representative government.

The case against the Constitution can be read in the writings and speeches of a less tight-knit and less well-known group of their opponents, known as the Anti-Federalists.[3] This view was espoused by some high profile politicians and revolutionaries such as Melancton Smith (delegate to the Continental Congress) and 'founding father' Patrick Henry, alongside others who were less well-known or anonymous (writing under pseudonyms such as 'John DeWitt' and 'Brutus'). There is more variation in these writers' views than between Hamilton, Madison and Jay who sought to write with one voice under the pen-name 'Publius'.[4] However, overall, the Anti-Federalists are concerned with domestic politics, with the effect that government has on its citizens, and thus fundamentally with the nature of the relationship between the state and the citizen. Their very different goal was the protection of emerging smaller scale democracies in which citizens could themselves exercise power.

This historical moment perhaps comes closer to being the 'social contract' in action than any other time in history. For these writers and their contemporaries, the social contract was not a device to understand or legitimise existing systems, as it was for Hobbes and others who have come after him. It was a real and far-reaching choice. Indeed, the American protagonists' own sense of

[3] As an aside, the terms 'Federalists' and 'Anti-Federalists' are something of a misnomer; the Federalists wanted a union based on one people, in effect one state, whereas the Anti-Federalists, given this name because they distrusted the concentration of power at federal level, in fact wanted a more genuinely federal union of allied but independent states.

[4] This was despite the fact that they would belong to different parties in the new government, illustrating the extent to which fundamental questions over the nature of democracy supersede 'party political' distinctions.

being at a turning point in history leaps from the pages of their writing, their sense of responsibility to us and the future. The revolutionary pamphleteer Tom Paine declared that 'birth-day of a new world is at hand' (Paine, 1776:53) and that their actions were not 'the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected, even to the end of time, by the proceedings now' (*op. cit*.:20). Likewise, Hamilton begins his arguments in Federalist 1 with the reflection that 'it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice' (Federalist 1:11).[5]

This is the core subject matter of their writing; what freedoms would they give up to what kind of state in return for which protections and rights? This was no abstract decision, no elegant thought experiment. Therefore, the outcome does not represent an ideal, but a hard-fought accommodation between different positions, interests and values. This is illustrated, for example, by Madison's discomfort at finding himself in the position of recommending the compromise on slavery (Federalist 54). In this, the United States of the late 1780s is comparable to every other really existing democracy, our own included.

Theoretical visions of democracy rest on relatively coherent values and views of human nature and the state; actual democracies, while they have a dominant underlying ethos, embody the struggle between competing values. These struggles have left their scars on the body politic in the form of inconsistencies and tensions, and other understandings of words and concepts such as liberty, equality and democracy itself, meanings somewhat left behind by history, but bearing a rich tradition nonetheless. This inclination in the development of our democracy, while it has perhaps been stunted, remains with us, offering a window of opportunity for challenging hegemonic thought. The ideological and practical construction of representative government in post-colonial America helps us comprehend the meaning of the democratic legacy we have inherited. The drama of the struggle between two different approaches to democracy illuminates the corresponding narratives of state, society and human nature, as well as different views on underpinning ideas such as liberty and equality.

[5] All page references for the Federalist Papers in this chapter relate to the 2008 Oxford University Press edition, Hamilton *et al*, edited by Lawrence Goldman.

However, the American Revolution is also an important moment because it inspired people. Democracy entered this period of history as a 'dirty word', and left it a legitimising force. Tom Paine, a key figure in terms of social and political change in England, America and France, was no dry theorist but a revolutionary who was read, whose words changed things, and whose words, as a result, the English state went to great lengths to suppress.[6] Paine doesn't describe America dispassionately, but presents it as an inspiration, an example to follow, celebrating French soldiers who were 'placed in the school of freedom, and learned the practice as well as the principles of it by heart' – and who carried them back to France (Paine, 1792a:146). The American Revolution established democracy as respectable and, crucially, possible. Previously, it was understood to be a form of government which required the highest virtue, motives and judgement. The Federalists rested their case on a pragmatic shift in understanding, that as democratic institutions are created by 'fallible men' [*sic*], they do not have to be perfect, just less imperfect than the alternative or preceding institutions (see Federalists 37-38). America is important because it has shaped us, but also because it reminds us that if we're going to change the world, it helps to have inspiration. We need to see new ideas about democracy take shape and come alive. Indeed, this period of history reminds us why examples such as Porto Alegre are vital for democrats today.

It is also worth remembering that while the Federalists were conscious of their historical importance, they could not of course predict the consequences of their beliefs and actions. Tom Paine belonged without a shadow of a doubt to the 'order of equality', as we see perhaps most clearly in his tract *Agrarian Justice* – in essence a visionary design for a welfare state (Paine, 1797), yet he aligned himself with the Federalists, believing the emerging modes of commerce were a democratising force and would ensure peace and prosperity for all. We can see here the integral link between the form that America's politics took and the beginnings of the expansionist moment for capital. This is no conspiracy theory; Paine is a symbol that, for some at least, democracy and capitalism's journey

[6] The *Rights of Man* was outlawed in England because of establishment fears that the 'French madness' would spread, following plans for a cheaper edition (significant because it would be more accessible to the poor). A Royal Proclamation against seditious writing was issued in May 1792, together with a warrant for Paine's arrest, describing him as 'a wicked, malicious, seditious, and evil disposed person' (Paine, 1792b:367). Paine was in France working on the Republican constitution by the time the hand-picked jury outlawed him (Philp, 1995:xii-xiii).

together began in good faith. The value for us is not in simplistically ascribing to those actors a desire to end up here, but in tracing our story backwards, and understanding the choices that brought us to the democracy we have today, choices which had the effect of turning our democracy towards one path and away from others – choices that we perhaps at times forget we still have.

As I have said, the outcome was not a clear-cut enactment of one vision to the exclusion of the other. The constitution itself was a compromise hammered out between many different factions and interests, as Madison discusses in Federalist 37, with the evident aim of encouraging dissenters to accept the compromises contained in the constitution (Federalist 37:179). After the event, the Anti-Federalists were still influential, Jefferson in particular being sympathetic to these views (Ketcham, 2003:20). Also, there were naturally differences of view within each side of the debate. Much has of course been written on this and other aspects of the American Revolution; here I am concerned only with the broad sweep of the different perspectives (which inevitably underplays important nuances and internal debates) in order to illustrate the evolutionary and value-laden nature of democratic theory in action.

Finally, and unlike the coming revolution in France, this was not a social transformation which included the poorest as actors. These democratic struggles took place amongst the new elites who had so recently thrown off the moribund British aristocracy, against a backdrop of social ferment and unrest at all levels in society (see Ray Raphael's 2001 book *The American Revolution: a people's history* for a view of these events from the perspective of ordinary Americans of all classes, ethnicity and gender). Furthermore, in this uncharted territory it was not clear to the actors of the day how their momentous decisions about state and society would play out. In the following section, I consider the aims and concerns of each side, and explore the contrasting understandings of human nature, state and society that underpin them.

Federalist and Anti-federalist visions and goals

In the winter of 1787-88, the view held by the Federalists largely prevailed at federal level. Accordingly, our current systems owe a great deal to their vision of an empowered political elite with an expansionist trade and commerce agenda,

checked by reference to a relatively politically inactive and contained populace.[7] Key figures amongst the Anti-Federalists have largely faded from historical view, whereas Hamilton, Madison and Jay went on to become the first Secretary of the Treasury, the fourth President and the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, playing their part in embedding that vision of democracy in our collective psyche.

These three were already prominent figures on the national stage by the time they wrote The Federalist Papers. Hamilton was renowned for his illustrious service as George Washington's aide-de-camp during the Revolutionary War, Madison was a protégée of Thomas Jefferson who became the youngest delegate to the Continental Congress in 1779, while Jay was a wealthy lawyer who organised opposition to British rule, serving as president of the Congress from 1778. Importantly, they saw the federal government as the stage which they personally would occupy; it is the viewpoint from which they considered the ramifications of democratic design (they were potential rulers considering a polity, not first and foremost citizens viewing the system they would live under).[8]

Fresh from an international power struggle shaped by the elites of England, France and Russia, and personally very conscious of the ongoing fragility of the new state for which they fought so passionately, they tended to look to the maintenance of the new territories international position. Thus, Hamilton defines the primary purpose of the federal state as defence and trade (Federalist 23:114). As such, their concerns accord with the orientation towards individualistic self-interest in viewing the state as existing to safeguard liberty, property and trade. What powers would enhance their abilities to act in this arena? We can read here both a real concern for the territory's independence and power in a still volatile and potentially hostile environment, and a subjective standpoint as the new elites who sought to hold power at this level, and who were fully conscious of the tinderbox of social unrest. The new settlers of America – of all social stations – had recently collaborated to throw off unjust rule, and were in no mood to accept new masters.

[7] It is worth noting that there is a great deal of distinction between state and federal politics in the US. While anti-federalist values have naturally played a much greater role at state level, it is with the federal level debates that this chapter is concerned.

[8] A significant distinction, which I characterise as the difference between a 'citizen-eye view' and an 'engineer's-eye view'; I discuss this idea further in later chapters.

The goal of a strong national state is a consistent thread in Federalist writing. The Federalists do have concerns about unchecked government; emerging from the shadow of monarchy and colonial rule, they insist on the formal sovereignty of the people not the powerful. However, they prioritise commerce and trade, and understand an accountable but strong government to be necessary to promote and protect these. In laying out the aims of the Federalist Papers, Hamilton asserts by way of a foundational principle that 'the vigor of government is essential to the security of liberty' (Federalist 1:13), and later stresses that government must have the means to carry out the tasks entrusted to it (Federalist 26:148). Thus government is above all presented as the means to an end (the pressing need to secure the new territory against ongoing external threats as well as internal divisions), rather than as an end in itself: a collective expression of the popular will.

Consciously nation-building (the dangers of 'faction' is another recurring theme), the Federalists thus sought to secure the legitimising force of democracy to the Federal rather than State government. Hamilton writes of the need to 'extend the authority of the union to the persons of the citizens – the only proper objects of government' with the explicit aim of 'forming the characteristic difference between a league and a government' (Federalist 15:76). This aim shaped the Federalists commitment to representative rather than participatory democracy (in their terms a republic rather than a democracy), due to the scale of the political entity they wished to legitimise as a single democracy, namely the union as a whole, rather than individual states. Madison states this clearly:

> 'In a democracy the people meet and exercise the government in person; in a republic they assemble and administer it by their representatives and agents. A democracy, consequently, must be confined to a small spot. A republic may be extended over a large region.' (Federalist 14:68).

This illustrates how the Federalists' goal of nation-building requires this form of 'democracy'. This goal was closely linked to their agenda for trade and commerce, rooted in the attempt to strengthen a fledgling state, and prepared the ground for later capitalist expansion. However, it is worth noting that the relationship between a large polity and representative government was one which the Federalists wholly approved. They favoured representative

government because it enabled the large polity they were committed to, but equally they regarded the fact that a large polity required representative government as a positive part of the case for a large polity, because it contained the turbulence of the multitude. Again, Madison makes the case explicitly:

> 'It clearly appears that the same advantage which a republic has over a democracy in controlling the effects of faction is enjoyed by a large over a small republic – is enjoyed by the Union over the States composing it. Does this advantage consist in the substitution of representatives whose enlightened views and virtuous sentiments render them superior to local prejudices and to schemes of injustice? It will not be denied that the representation of the Union will be most likely to possess these requisite endowments.' (Federalist 10:54).

In striking contrast, the Anti-Federalists were more likely to be found amongst the local elites within individual states, who feared the loss of their autonomy to a distant federal power which might neither understand nor value their individual circumstances. Thus a key reason they opposed the Federalists and favoured democratic power at state level was precisely because it gave greater scope for participation, or at least representation in the spirit of delegation *by* the people rather than representation *of* the people, than the Federalists wished to enable.[9] Critically, operating from a viewpoint at state level with a more localist agenda, they wished to retain space for dissent between states, which the Federalists consciously wished to minimise.

While the Anti-Federalists do not represent the 'order of equality' in simplistic terms as I have presented it, they do stand for a more localised participatory understanding of democracy than that espoused by the Federalists. In the following discussion, I do not dwell on the exclusions which the Anti-Federalists take for granted; women, slaves and the poorest do not visibly count as democratic actors in their writings. This is not to downplay the importance of these exclusions; my aim is rather to explore the different conceptions of human nature, state, liberty and equality which correspond with different perspectives on 'the people' (and it is certainly not in the exclusion of women and the very

[9] They therefore regard themselves as citizens evaluating the structures by which others seek to exercise power in their name; to the extent that this is the case, their arguments reflect what I have termed a 'citizen-eye view'.

poorest sections of society that the Anti-Federalists differed from the Federalists). My intention is not to romanticise the Anti-Federalists, but to identify threads of democratic thought which were constrained by the structural triumph of the Federalists' particular vision of representative government.

Anti-Federalists writings clearly demonstrate their affinity and preoccupation with the 'middling classes' rather than 'the people' as a whole, as we would understand the term today (Melancton Smith asserts that 'the substantial yeomanry of the country are more temperate, of better morals and less ambition than the great', 21st June 1788:344). Their concerns are not primarily outward-looking, the position of the state within the world or the freedom of the powerful to act on behalf of the state, but focus on the relationship between power-holders and the people (as they understand them).

Crucially, for the Federalists, democracy is a justification for elite power, whose scope and direction they are concerned with. For the Anti-Federalists, democracy *is* power. They are interested in democracy as a system for decision-making, not only as a source of legitimacy. Their concern is with the autonomy and political activity of the individual (by which they generally mean the 'middling classes' with whom they identify) rather than the autonomy of statesmen.[10] Theirs was a vision of small republics where virtuous, self-reliant citizens managed their own affairs; the stage they sought to occupy was not international, and so they rejected the political and commercial ambitions of the Federalists.

Two views of 'the People': democracy and class in Revolutionary America

Given their context, it is unsurprising that for the Federalists, 'the people' appear as an abstraction, a construct in democratic theory which confers legitimacy. In their writings, 'the people' do not appear as a capable, self-determining force of government. They are appealed to; they do not initiate action. Hamilton asserts that the consent of the people is the 'pure, original fountain of all legitimate authority' but defines the consent of the people as ratifying systems of

[10] While the Anti-Federalists' challenge to Federal authority aimed to bring the seat of power closer to the individual, it also illustrates how each new settlement creates a new power dynamic, a new elite which must then be challenged and unsettled. In this sense, the enactment of democracy is best understood as a journey, an ongoing series of claims to be exercised by the disenfranchised in each society; it has no endpoint.

government, not decision-making (Federalist 23:113). The legitimising power of democracy was specifically and narrowly defined during this moment of history in a way we have come to take for granted. This thread recurs. Madison warns against ‘too frequent appeals’ to the people (Federalist 49:251), and praises representation as ‘a defense to the people against their own temporary errors and delusions’ (Federalist 63:310).

For the Federalists, human nature can appear as individualistic and ultimately selfish, a force to be restrained. ‘Men’ [*sic*] are ‘ambitious, vindictive and rapacious’ (Federalist 6:29), and have ‘so strong [a] propensity to fall into mutual animosities’ that ‘the latent causes of faction [dissent and group conflict] are thus sown in the nature of man’ (Federalist 10:50). Madison puts it explicitly: ‘what is government but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary’ (Federalist 51:257). People as an idea are the source of power, but in the mass they have the shades of a mob to be feared. He warns of ‘the danger of disturbing the public tranquillity by interesting too strongly the public passions’ (Federalist 49:251), arguing that while democracy is control by the reason of the people (in the person of elite representatives), government should control the passions of the people as a whole. It is self-evident that such a view of humanity shapes the corresponding assumptions made about democracy. When actual people make an appearance, they are to be contained.

Thus, the contrast between the picture presented of representatives’ qualities and that of the masses reveals a seemingly contradictory view of the potential within human nature. Madison says that while there is good and bad in human nature, ‘republican government presupposes the existence of [qualities justifying esteem and confidence] in a higher degree than any other form’ (Federalist 55:277-8). Indeed, Hamilton describes the purpose of the essays as to persuade ‘wise and good men’ [*sic*] that they should give their consent to the new Constitution (Federalist 1:12). Thus, Madison commends ‘the substitution of representatives whose enlightened views and virtuous sentiments render them superior to local prejudices and to schemes of injustice’ (Federalist 10:54). Here we see how far this incarnation of democracy (which we have inherited) has moved from the Athenian model of citizen control. For the Athenians there was a clear distinction between involving experts as advisors on technical

matters, and as decision-makers. The 'universality' of civic virtue (which was not innate but learned in the polis) was seen as critical to democratic practice (Meiksins Wood, 1995:192-4).[11] Accordingly, Aristotle believed that representation by election was anti-democratic because it favoured the elite. It was used when technical expertise was needed (for example, generals commanding military action), but usual democratic practice rested on selection by lot. Selection implies that all citizens have the potential for civic wisdom; election accords with the idea of expert rule and a politically incompetent mass.

By contrast, within the Federalist Papers there is a distinct theme of reassuring the elite that the constitution contains rather than advances the emergent power of the people, stated unambiguously by Hamilton in Federalist 36:

> 'The representation of the people … will consist almost entirely of proprietors of land, of merchants, and of members of the learned professions, who will truly represent all those different interests and views [of the various classes].' (Federalist 36:168).

Tellingly, this discussion occurs in a series of essays on taxation, the clear implication being that the poor will not be allowed into power to tax the rich. Madison assures his readers that:

> 'Mechanics and manufacturers will always be inclined, with few exceptions, to give their votes to merchants in preference to persons of their own professions or trades … they know that the merchant is their natural patron and friend; and they are aware that however great their confidence they may justly feel in their own good sense, their interests can be more effectually promoted by the merchant than by themselves. They are sensible that their habits in life have not been such as to give them those acquired endowments, without which in a deliberative assembly the greatest natural ability are for the most part useless; and that the influence and weight and superior acquirements of the merchants render them more equal to a contest with any spirit which might happen to infuse itself into the public councils, unfriendly to the manufacturing and trading interests.' (Federalist 35:165).

[11] Universal across those considered citizens, of course.

Democracy in this tradition is about strong government, not a strong citizenry. The Federalists do not believe the people as a whole are capable of effective decision-making (thus, during the 1787 Constitutional Convention, Hamilton described 'the mass of the people' as 'turbulent and changing; they seldom judge or determine right'; Zinn, 1996:95). We the masses confer legitimacy, but the business of politics is best done for us by our betters. Representative democracy has not failed to erode elite control. It has succeeded in the aim it was designed to achieve. This is not the democratic rhetoric we hear today, but our Western systems of government remain very close to the one designed by the Federalists to protect us from ourselves. To underline the intention that representative government separates the people from power, Madison stresses that the distinction between the American government and ancient democracies 'lies *in the total exclusion of the people in their collective capacity*' in the new American system, not the absence of representation in Athens (Federalist 63:313; emphasis in original). In other words, both systems utilised representation, but Madison makes clear that the new American democracy is different because it *only* uses representation; there are no opportunities alongside this for the collective, direct articulation of the popular will.[12]

Importantly, this view of representation is in direct opposition to the right of recall, which as we will see is a strong Anti-Federalist theme, and recurs in modern democratic alternatives such as participatory budgeting (and of course is still present at State level in the US). The representative model of democracy, promoted by the Federalists and embedded in the UK, draws on Edmund Burke's famous dictum that 'your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion' (Burke, 1774). What is critical here is that the right of recall retains real power with the people as a whole; Burke's view in contrast defends and codifies the removal of that power.

While 'the people' do not appear as active political agents in the pages of the Federalist Papers, of course this is exactly what they were, as the Federalists

[12] It is important to note, therefore, that a critique of 'representative democracy' is not a condemnation of representation, *per se*. Rather, it is a critique of a particular model of representation, one which is based on the substitution of expert decision-making for popular control, rather than, as in the Anti-Federalist understanding and in Porto Alegre, a delegate model whereby representatives convey rather than replace the wider views of citizens.

were fully aware. The Constitution – and its defence by the Federalists – was written in the closing days of the American Revolution, and despite history's preoccupation with heroes and generals, it was a Revolution made by the common people as much as the great, people who in the absence of an American civil police force had been enforcing social norms and justice through collective public action for decades, tearing down bawdy houses, liberating impressed seamen and rioting against unjust taxation (Raphael, 2001:12). The Revolution itself was moved forwards through massive uprisings of the people, against which the British Army was powerless, notably in Massachusetts in 1774, where tens of thousands of rural folk participated in a spontaneous uprising with no leaders, decisions being made by participants. While rich and poor worked together against the colonial powers, class dynamics did not simply evaporate. 'Shirtmen' signed up but refused to take orders from their 'betters' and many soldiers insisted on democratic decision-making (*op. cit*.:59, 94-96). The Boston tea party symbolises how the social resentments of the poor against the extravagances of the rich dovetailed with a strategic resistance to the tax on tea: a conspicuous luxury good (*op. cit*.:17).

Gouverneur Morris, author of large sections of the Constitution, witnessed a crowd action on the eve of the Revolution and wrote as follows to John Penn (a signatory in 1776 to the Declaration of Independence):

> 'These sheep, simple as they are, cannot be gulled as heretofore. In short, there is no ruling them; and now, to leave the metaphor, the heads of the mobility grow dangerous to the gentry; and how to keep them down is the question … The mob begin to think and to reason. Poor reptiles: it is with them a vernal morning, they are struggling to cast off their winter's slough, they bask in the sunshine, and ere noon they will bite, depend upon it. the gentry begin to fear this … I see, and I see it with fear and trembling, that if the disputes with Great Britain continue, we shall be under the worst of all possible dominions; we shall be under the dominion of a riotous mob.' (Morris, 20th May, 1774).

Democracy was not handed down by the elite, it was demanded by the people, a people who had witnessed the assertion of self-determination by a nation, and

now asserted their own right to self-determination, as Ebenezer Fox, who at the age of twelve ran away to join the revolutionary forces, later recalled:

> ‘Almost all the conversation that came to my ears related to the injustice of England and the tyranny of government. It is perfectly natural that the spirit of insubordination that prevailed should spread among the younger members of the community. We made direct application of the doctrines we daily heard, in relation to the oppression of the mother country, to our own circumstances.’ (Fox, 1838:17-18)

In the aftermath of the armed struggle against the British, the assertion of popular power continued. This has come to be symbolised by Shay’s Rebellion, a 1786 Massachusetts insurrection which challenged the decisions of the legislature in Boston, and which was regarded by ‘men of means [as] the opening of a war of poor against rich' (Mee, 1987:39). These events were fresh in the minds of the Federalists, who referred to them directly as evidence of the potential for ‘tyranny on the ruins of order and law’ (Federalist 21:102).

It would be hard to overstate the importance of a class-based reading of this chapter of our democratic history, despite the fact that many contemporaneous voices ridiculed the idea that class distinction existed in America (as Melancton Smith points out, 1788:344). Hamilton asserts that ‘in a political view [the landed interest is] perfectly united from the wealthiest landlord to the poorest tenant’ (Federalist 35:166). While acknowledged class consciousness may be in short supply in the pages of the Federalist Papers (indeed, class interests are flatly denied), class analysis was clearly not absent from the aims of the Federalists.

By contrast, for the Anti-Federalists, power and class consciousness emerge as a theme; the corresponding view of human nature is naturally very different to that of the Federalists. People appear as refreshingly capable (at least the middling classes with whom the Anti-Federalists identified); their involvement in decision-making is to be facilitated not contained. Their writings reveal a sense of cooperative and collective potential within human nature, and democracy emerges as the mechanism to nurture and facilitate this. This is key to the democratic narrative oriented to equality, and is echoed in the development of Tom Paine’s thought through the French Revolution. In *The Rights of Man, Part 2*, he links a faith in the public capacity for government with the scope for real

deliberation: ‘when public matters are open to debate, and the public judgement free, it will not decide wrong, unless it decides too hastily’ (Paine, 1792a:244), and vehemently rejects the anti-democratic view symbolised by Burke’s defence of monarchy as a ‘contemptible opinion of mankind … a herd of beings that must be governed by fraud, effigy and shew’ (*op. cit.*: 226).

This more nuanced view of human nature is also expressed in the Anti-Federalists’ clear awareness of the effect of power on the power-holders. Rather than presenting a crude distinction between good men and a fearsome mob, they are alive to the importance of learned behaviour and political culture (both negative in the sense of power corrupting and positive in the sense of learned civic capacity). This is a more nuanced view of human nature, but also an interesting reflection on the nature of class. The Anti-Federalists were not talking about an established aristocracy, but an elite making a place for itself in the new society (though of course often rooted in historical privilege). These discussions are concerned with the mutually reinforcing relationship between power and class, rather than a simplistic reading that class determines power.

Representation and the State: different models, different aims

These foundations give rise to very different views of representation and democracy. As we will see, Anti-Federalist concerns regarding representation are around how to structurally support good representation, and guard against the opposing potential for self-aggrandisement, which they understood to be a danger attendant on distance between representatives and the people. Where the Federalists envisioned a strong government to contain the mob, the Anti-Federalists reasoned that if basic human decency, most visible at community level, could directly and continuously affect government, then the tendency of government to abuse power could be contained. Here we see a difference in conceptions of democracy whose significance can scarcely be exaggerated. Government is to learn from the people, not the other way around.

At a fundamental level, the Anti-Federalists’ understanding of human nature allowed them to ask if it was possible to found society on positive collective aspirations and community bonds within society as a whole, rather than trying to harness the energy of competing greed and self-interest. In their view, this is the root of the importance which the Federalists attach to a balance of powers

between different sections of the elite (see Federalist 10 and Federalist 51). Anti-Federalist writings present these negative traits as a result of systems of government and power, rather than the starting point for designing democracy. 'John DeWitt' describes this clearly:

> 'It cannot be doubted … that there is a charm in politicks. That persons who enter reluctantly into office become habituated, grown fond of it, and are loath to resign it. They feel themselves flattered and elevated and are apt to forget their constituents, until the time returns that they again feel the want of them. They uniformly exercise all the powers granted to them, and ninety-nine in a hundred are grasping at more.'
> ('DeWitt', 5th November 1787:313).

Power is seen to affect the nature of those subject to it as well as those who exercise it, with oppressive rule understood to erode the self-respect, capacities and virtues of the people (Ketcham, 2003:19). Melancton Smith contends that 'the same passions and prejudices govern all men: the circumstances in which men are placed in a great measure give a cast to the human character' (21st June 1788, p.344). Similarly, *The Rights of Man*, written in defence of the French Revolution (which fundamentally linked democracy and equality), is infused with Paine's belief that society shapes human nature. He says 'there is existing in man, a mass of sense lying in a dormant state' which revolution, the experience of freedom and democracy, brings forth (Paine, 1792a:228). Paine clearly believed in the social development of capacity for government.

It is this view of human nature as shaped by circumstance which generates the Anti-Federalist view of representation. Where the Federalists are concerned with the autonomy of elite representatives, whom they trust more than they do 'the people', the Anti-Federalists' over-riding concern is with the responsiveness of representatives to the people whom they represent. There is a strong sense of distrust of distant government, whose interests easily deviate from those of the people, unless representatives are known, recallable and responsive.[13]

[13] There are of course layers of complexity regarding the values informing views on democratic structure, as exemplified by the current dominance of this terrain in the US by the libertarian Right, who have arguably engaged more strongly with the 'anti-government' tradition of the Anti-Federalists than with their 'pro-democracy' standpoint (a distinction I discuss briefly later).

The Anti-Federalists are primarily concerned with *trust* within the representative relationship, not accountability and transparency, a core concern of the Federalists and also within our political system today. We conflate these with trust; the Anti-Federalists distinguished them, and sought to describe a system in which actual trust could flourish, based on 'such dialogue, empathy and even intimacy that the very distinctions between ruler and rule would tend to disappear' (Ketcham, 2003:19). Trust is based in knowing your representative; it is important to note that accountability and transparency as we understand them today are a *substitute* for knowledge and trust. Thus Anti-Federalists argued that representatives must have an 'acquaintance with the common concerns and occupations of the people, which men of the middling class of life are in general much better competent to, than those of a superior class' (Smith, 21st June 1788:342). This meant that:

> 'A fair representation … should be so regulated, that every order of men [*sic*] in the community … can have a share in it – in order to allow professional men, merchants, traders, farmers, mechanics, etc., to bring a just proportion of their best informed men respectively into the legislature' ('Federal Farmer', 1787:265).[14]

With too great a distance between representative and citizens, whether geographically, by virtue of representing too great a number of people, or because the elite presumes to represent the whole of the people, representatives are understood to, 'however well disposed, … become strangers to the very people choosing them, they reside at a distance from you, you have no control over them, you cannot observe their conduct' ('DeWitt', 5th November, 1787:315). In this vein, Anti-Federalists also argued for frequent elections, non-continuous periods of office, so that 'persons habituated to the exercise of power should ever be reminded from whence they derive, by a return to the station of private citizens' ('DeWitt', 27th October, 1787:197), and that while in office, 'every man employed in a high office by the people, should from time to time return to them, that he may be in a situation to satisfy them with respect to his conduct and the measures of administration' (Smith,

[14] A lengthy series of anonymous articles entitled *Letters from the Federal Farmer* were published in the Poughkeepsie Country Journal between November 1787 and January 1788. These were long thought to be the work of Richard Henry Lee, but were more probably written by Melancton Smith (Ketcham, 2003:256-7).

1788:351). The recurring theme is that representation must be substantive, not formal. They placed their faith in the vigour of the ruled, not in the rules themselves. Thus, democracy rests ultimately on action not structure.

For the Anti-Federalists, therefore, representation is understood in the sense of being a delegate, mandated and instructed by citizens. Citizens have an active, not passive role in decision-making. 'Brutus' (29th November, 1787:328) discusses this issue at length, pointing out that if you do not know your representative, they cannot explain to you the motives for their decisions. Crucially, he points out that representatives you do not know 'will not be viewed by the people as part of themselves, but as a body distinct from them, and having separate interests to pursue' (*ibid*.). Likewise, Bryan (1787:236) denounces the Federalist model of representation because 'it would be in practice a permanent aristocracy' (in the Rousseauian sense of rule by an elite, rather than our modern understanding). What is fascinating here is that what our society tends to take for granted, the existence of a separate political class – politics as the activity of politicians – the Anti-Federalists saw as grounds for concern, something to be challenged.[15]

Specifically, they contested the right presumed by the elite to rule over a people they considered inferior, threatening or less capable. Thus, Bryan condemns 'the wealthy and ambitious, who in every community think they have a right to lord it over their fellow creatures' (Bryan, 1787:229) and calls the proposed constitution 'the most daring attempt to establish a despotic aristocracy among freemen, that the world has ever witnessed' (*op. cit*.:232). Overall, the Anti-Federalists proposed a model of representation in which the citizen was engaged and active, and whereby the representative was constrained from divorcing or distancing himself from the citizens he (and it was he, of course) represented; a model which stands in stark contrast to the empowered and permanent political elite which unquestionably characterises British democracy today, as I will discuss in the following chapter.

[15] It is interesting to note that the process for ratifying the Constitution specified by the Constitutional Convention was an elected state convention of 'representatives'. However, the state of Rhode Island rejected this approach, substituting their preferred method of an 'orderly assembly' of the people. Through this more participatory approach, the Constitution was rejected (Rhode Island ratified the Constitution in 1790 under threat of isolation and possible dismemberment) (Fishkin, 1995:26-29). Apparently, representative decision-making of the type espoused by the Federalists was approved more easily by a body *of* such representatives, than through the wider engagement of the people.

Given this class analysis, it is easy to comprehend that for the Federalists, the state at the level of the Federal Union was 'us' while for the Anti-Federalists it was 'them'. The Federalists feared the lower classes as 'them' and sought to create distance between rulers and ruled, where the Anti-Federalists embraced at least a limited section of the people as 'us', and sought to decrease distance between the two. While without doubt an oversimplification, the point of this broad brush observation is to underline the importance of viewpoint in shaping our understandings of democracy. As I have pointed out, the Federalists saw themselves in the new government; they were harnessing the legitimising force of democracy to increase the freedom and power of the fledgling and still fragile state (Hamilton tells us that 'energy in the executive is a leading character in the definition of good government', Federalist 70:344), while preventing a repeat of past excesses through democratic accountability. The state, for the Federalists as for the monarchs before them, remained a vehicle for ensuring trade and national prominence, and strengthening the territory against outside threats.

To this extent, their view of the democratic state is arguably less of a break with the hierarchical, monarchist tradition than that of the Anti-Federalists, who distrust government for historical reasons but are concerned via democracy to shape it, to make it less 'them' and more 'us'. Accordingly, their view of the purpose of the state is distinctly different from the Federalists, and more focused on creating the conditions for the satisfaction of citizens' needs. The Federalists looked outwards and upwards – the Anti-Federalists looked to the people of the democracy. Government is not to be their voice on a larger stage, but a vehicle created to ensure they can meet their needs.[16]

We cannot understand these themes without understanding the context of the time, a period in which government was monarchic, despotic, hitherto almost wholly associated with oppression. Thus, the Anti-Federalists could be anti-government, but pro-democracy, and so they tried to conceptualise democracy in a way which increased the possibility of non-oppressive government. Crucially, and despite their limited understanding of 'the people', they were interested in the democratic exercise of power, not only the democratic holding

[16] This illustrates the significance of the distinction between an 'engineer's-eye view' and a 'citizen-eye view'.

of statesmen to account, which is the dominant view of citizenship bequeathed to us by the American Revolution.

Liberty, equality and democracy

These two very different understandings of the purpose of the state are closely bound up with different visions of equality and liberty. A brief examination of both helps us to understand how these three concepts, the goals you wish to achieve via the state, and the kinds of equality and liberty you hope to achieve, require very different characters of democracy.

This period of history has bequeathed to us a very specific view of equality, clearly described by de Tocqueville in his contemporaneous review *Democracy in America*. This represented an important shift from the period before. As we have seen, democracy and equality were in general seen as synonymous prior to the age of revolutions. The link between the two was not broken by the American Revolution, but equality was fundamentally redefined, in order to make democracy acceptable to the new elites. The rehabilitated notion of equality which emerged alongside the newly respectable concept of democracy is significantly about political, not substantive, equality:

> ‘In the United States the citizens have no sort of pre-eminence over one another; they owe each other no mutual obedience or respect; they all meet for the administration of justice, for the government of the state, and in general, to treat of the affairs that concern their common welfare; but I never heard that attempts have been made to bring them all to follow the same diversions or to amuse themselves promiscuously in the same places of recreation.’ (De Tocqueville, 1840:300)

For de Tocqueville, this is clearly explained by the understanding that ‘no state of society or laws can render men so much alike but that education, fortune, and tastes will interpose some differences between them’ (*ibid*.). Thus the goal (in terms of equality) of this democratic vision is more limited than that espoused even by the Anti-Federalists and very much more limited than that espoused during the French Revolution, where the conceptualisation of democracy began with substantive equality as a goal. The quote above illustrates how, for the Federalists, democracy was clearly not intended to erase

material inequality. In Federalist 10, Madison puts forward as an argument for a large territory the assurance that ‘a rage for paper money, for an abolition of debts, for an equal division of property, or for any other improper or wicked projects, will be less apt to pervade the whole body of the Union than a particular member of it’ (Federalist 10:54-55).

In contrast, the Anti-Federalist understanding of democracy offers a very different perspective on the relationship between democracy and equality:

> ‘A republican, or free government, can only exist where the body of the people are virtuous, and where property is pretty equally divided; in such a government the people are the sovereign and their sense or opinion is the criterion of every public measure; for when this is changed, ceases to be the case, the nature of the government is changed, and an aristocracy, monarchy or despotism will rise on its ruin.’
> (Bryan, 1787:231)

The perceived close relationship between democracy and substantive equality preceded the American Revolution, flourished briefly in France, but ultimately has (thus far) lost the contest for supremacy. In the American Revolution we see the early capitalist substitution of political equality for substantive equality. The popular view of democracy was materially changed here. The taken-for-granted truth of the time, that too much inequality will result in the undemocratic exercise of power by the powerful, was challenged and another ‘truth’ took its place: political equality can co-exist with material inequality. As we will see in Chapter 5, proponents of participatory budgeting see the ‘inversion of priorities’ (public spending as contributing to increased equality) as a vital component of its democratic credentials. We can see that in this sense, participatory democracy does not merely involve more people in the democratic process; it is engaged in a much more radical project. It redefines how democracy is popularly understood – reclaiming a tradition of democracy oriented to equality.

Definitions of equality are of course closely tied to associated definitions of liberty. The prevailing legacy of the American Revolution champions personal liberty. This is understood as the individual capacity to act without constraint, and so breeds suspicion of too great a sense of responsibility to and for others (which a concern with substantive equality requires). However, it must be

remembered that this came with an important caveat: that states and individuals must give up some liberties in order to gain the protection of the state with regard to other liberties. Hamilton makes this case most clearly in Federalist 8, arguing for an empowered central state in order to protect against infighting between regions – which the Federalists anticipate following from too much liberty at state level (Federalist 8:39-43): 'the vigor of government is essential to the security of liberty' (Federalist 1:13).

Similarly, modern liberal democracies champion freedom for the individual through markets rather than through active democracy, despite a practical reliance on the state to ensure the operation of the capitalist market, which is understood as a non-negotiable role of the capitalist democratic state (see Miliband, 1969). Thus, in both cases the ideal of liberty is consciously used to justify reduced democratic control. The relationship between democracy, liberty and equality, when the democratic narrative is oriented to possessive individualism, requires a definition of democracy which allows for political equality without requiring substantive equality – and which creates citizens who can much more easily exercise individual rather than collective freedom.

A more substantive vision of equality requires a very different understanding of both liberty and democracy, a question that would come to the fore in France. Liberty, viewed through the lens of the order of equality, becomes a concern with human flourishing, which necessitates tackling constraints on the poor. Democracy must facilitate a collective freedom, to counterbalance the individual exercise of power by the elite. If, as for the Federalists, we see the state as separate from the people, an increase in state power reduces liberty (Madison discusses the tension they saw between the 'stability and energy of government' and 'liberty and the republican form', Federalist 37:176). If, on the other hand, our conception of democracy allows us to view the state as 'us' then state power, exercised collectively, can increase liberty (understood as human flourishing). These views of freedom are clearly in tension. Prioritising the freedom to act without constraint as a primary good (deliberately?) undermines collective action, through which a group acting together can increase their options and opportunities, and thus the freedom to make choices.

With this understanding, we can see the difference between the Federalists' view that government shouldn't ask the people too many questions ('every appeal to the people [carries] an implication of some defect in the government', Federalist 49:251) and the opposing view that 'the fundamental principle of a free government [is] that the people should make the laws by which they were to be governed' (Smith, 20th June 1788:341). To return to the views of the state which accord with these very different views of liberty and equality, it is evidently possible to understand the state as either a necessary evil, or a collective achievement. For the Federalists, democracy is a check on the tendency of the state to abuse power. For the Anti-Federalists, there is a hope that a state can be built in which government is close enough to the people to trust and use for public benefit (Ketcham, 2003:18).

What matters for us as democrats today, therefore, is the understanding that our taken-for-granted truths about democracy were once contested, but that as a result of specific historical factors, not least the fragility and turbulence besetting the fledgling federal government, the scene was set for a centralised, 'trade and empire' model of democracy, with its structural requirements for passive, contained citizens. Faith in an active and collective citizenry, and concerns about the effect of power on a permanent elite, were downplayed. In this critical moment for democratic theory, which of course does not stand alone but has been acted out in many different historical contexts and moments, both sides agreed that representation is a substitute for democracy. Representation, though clothed in the language of liberty and associated with the overthrow of monarchy and oppression, was introduced to strengthen elite control.

Democratic narratives in the UK

The late 18th and early 19th centuries were a time of democratic ferment in the UK as well as America and France. As context for the following chapter's examination of the state of British democracy today, I will briefly look at some of the threads of the two democratic narratives as they unfolded in the UK. It would, however, be impossible to discuss this period of history in the UK without at least a passing reference to the immense significance of the French Revolution, which was then unfolding just across the Channel.

While the global hegemonic dominance of representative democracy epitomises the triumph of the democratic narrative concerned with possessive individualism, the democratic orientation towards equality flourished briefly and dramatically with the French Revolution, a vital chapter in the story of democracy for many reasons. For the first time since the ancients, the word democracy was used in a positive sense (Christopherson, 1966:2); as we have seen, in America it was considered unworkable, a representative republic being substituted in its place. The French Revolution asserted the centrality of equality to democracy, in a way which the American Revolution did not do. Crucially, it changed what people then and since have believed is possible. Rousseau, one of the central theorists of the Revolution, declared that 'man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains' (Rousseau, 1762:5). A modern reader focuses on the chains; for contemporary readers it was rather the notion that man was born free that was both radical and intoxicating. Ideas that we take for granted were novel in 1789. One of the most revealing things about *The Rights of Man*, Paine's great defence of the French Revolution (1792a), is the amount of time and detail devoted to persuading the reader that democracy is superior to monarchist government.

The inspiration of the French Revolution is both symbolic and concrete. The Jacobin Constitution of 1793 was the first genuinely democratic constitution proclaimed by a modern state, based on universal male suffrage, granting substantive rights and asserting at the outset that the aim of government is the public good (*The Constitution of 1793*, reprinted in Hardman, 1999:173-177). While there are many debates over the extent of democratic innovation within the Revolution (see Hampson, 1983a), what is perhaps most important for our story, is how the people felt about the Revolution. It was born in hope, with a people who believed they could make the world anew. It aroused fear in elites around the world, but that was essentially because it profoundly inspired the poor, not least the British working classes who read Tom Paine avidly and defiantly. Seemingly for the first time, the poor could change the course of history; they could claim rights and citizenship alongside and over an elite who had pressed them into the dirt, broken their bodies for punishment and sport, and who had lived in ostentatious wealth while they could barely afford to eat even the poorest contaminated bread. To begin with, the Revolution was

bloodless, and based in a belief in the virtue of men (Hampson, 1983b:150-153), in the terms of our narratives, on a belief in the potential and capacity within human nature. The French Revolution represents a model of democracy in which sovereignty resides solidly with the people, not the state. Significantly for British democracy, it dramatically confirmed for the English elites that sovereignty must at all costs reside in Parliament not the people.

Their fears did not stem only from observation of what was occurring in France; the domestic mood was likewise distinctly revolutionary. The 1790s to the mid-nineteenth century in England was a concentrated period of agitation for greater substantive social and political equality, the awakening of a sleeping democratic tradition rooted in dissenting religious movements such as Wesleyanism and political movements such as the Levellers and the Diggers who fought for popular sovereignty and land justice. This was one factor in the English social context of that period, a growing political consciousness which flourished in certain sections of working communities. These included the artisan class whose culture of intellectual enquiry and mutuality, self-esteem and desire for independence, played a significant role in shaping political radicalism, and skilled workers such as weavers whose social egalitarianism fostered collective demands for improvement (Thompson, 1963:259-346). Secondly, social unrest and political agitation were intensified by the gathering pace of industrial change, which affected standards of living not only in a material sense but critically in terms of self-determination also (*op. cit.*:347-384). Finally, the agitation for democratic change, given urgency by exploitation and need, was also given hope by events across the Channel.

The English unrest was not disaffected rioting, but the structured growth of a new political consciousness. EP Thompson's unrivalled 1963 study *The Making of the English Working Class* gives a wealth of examples, from orderly food riots to enforce reasonable prices to the Chartist movement for political reform (as does John Foster's 1974 review of radical activity in three English towns). For the purposes of this chapter, three brief illustrations will suffice: the significance of Paine's *Rights of Man*, the role of popular debating clubs and the Luddite Rebellion of 1812.

Firstly, *Rights of Man* was read as a 'foundational text' by the working class (Thompson, 1963:99). Part 2 was published in 1792; by the following year sales had reached 200,000 within a population of 10 million (*op. cit*.:117). Paine's name was a household word, and his outlawing only intensified the efforts with which radical booksellers endeavoured to keep his banned works in circulation. What is significant here is the importance of theorising democracy in a radical and public form. This is a conscious movement for political change, rooted in a popular understanding of democracy.

As I've said, Paine's writings belong to the egalitarian narrative of democracy, which is rooted in a belief in the cooperative and collective potential of human nature. The development, from 1791 onwards, of popular debating clubs such as the London Corresponding Society exemplifies self-education and collective reflection in the pursuit of social and political change (indeed, they bring to mind the intellectual ferment of Paris in the years leading up to the 1871 Commune). Thus, the clubs developed a distinctive political structure, strategy and culture which supported English political radicalism through to the Chartists (McCalman, 1987), holding debates on such subjects as whether the French or English Constitution was more calculated for the glory of the respective empires and the happiness of individuals; whether the French Revolution, the ousting of James II, or the American Independence was the most striking instance of opposition to political tyranny; and the causes of the unequal representation of the people in the House of Commons (Thale, 1989:61). In such forums, radical political ideas developed and were rooted in popular ownership.

If the debating clubs symbolise citizenship capacity, my final English illustration, the Luddite Rebellion of 1812, is arguably the epitome of these ideas in action: active democratic agency. The view that history has handed down to us is that of a reactionary force, resisting progress and development. However, the historical evidence paints a very different picture. The Luddites were an organised political force with a coherent political agenda centred on social justice and democratic struggle (Reid, 1986; Dinwiddy, 1979; Thompson, 1963:569-659). The same croppers (skilled workers in the woollen trade) who would undertake a targeted campaign of machine-breaking, made proposals for the gradual introduction of machinery and development of alternative employment for displaced men, and along with the weavers, were said to have

raised between £10,000 and £12,000 in the three years from 1803 to 1806 (an actual figure, not its equivalent in modern money) for parliamentary struggle to retain protective legislation covering the woollen industry (Thompson, 1963:575-6). Indeed, a Luddite letter to insurers informed them of the intention 'to petition parliament for our rights; and, if they will not grant us them, by stopping the machinery belong us [*sic*], we are determined to grant them ourselves' (*op. cit.*:578). Direct action is consciously anticipated as an integral part of the democratic struggle, not separate from it.

Moreover, Luddism was a genuine people's movement with broad support, and, importantly, it was at least partially successful, wages rising as a result (*op. cit*.:608; Foster, 1974:43). It was a democratic moment which also worked as democratic education, in the sense that it was both radical and radicalising. Luddism thus helped develop industrial working class consciousness, a means by which workers came to understand democratic control as a necessary route to the improvement of their condition (Dinwiddy, 1979). Democracy here is taken not given, and it is inalienably linked to substantive justice and a concern with human flourishing. The clash of values inherent in the industrial revolution is represented by artisans struggling not only for material standards of living but for independence and community, against the factories which subsumed both to economic gain. The Luddite Rebellion is not an isolated example, but perhaps the definitive illustration of a groundswell of Jacobin and collectivist radicalism which built from the 1790s to the Chartist movement of the 1830s, arguably coming close to revolution in both 1819 and 1832 (Thompson, 1963:737).

It is instructive that the blossoming egalitarian vision of democracy, from the decade of the French Revolution onwards, met with an unequivocal response from state and elite power. State repression included the suspension of Habeas Corpus, emergency legislation regarding treason, 'seditious meetings' and the publication of anti-monarchist literature as well as the infamous Combination Acts (Emsley, 1985). The summer of 1812 saw 12,000 troops in the disturbed counties, a deployment which indicates the scale of the state response, and prefaces the Peterloo massacre of 1819. Less official repression included the widespread victimisation of English Jacobins and political radicals, and elite attempts to orchestrate a backlash: the reactionary *Association for Preserving Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers* financially sponsored

‘riots’ in three hundred English towns against *The Rights of Man* (Nelson, 2006:229; Foster, 1974:35). Behind this reaction, as we saw in America, lay a fear of the awakening labouring classes and profound disquiet at the association of political and economic demands inherent in an egalitarian vision of democracy. It is no accident that this period also sees the early stages of the capitalist ideological separation of politics and economics, with the aim of placing industrial capital beyond the reach of redistributive political intrusion.

Over the following decades, the struggle between popular democratic movements such as the Chartists and elites aiming to defuse revolutionary demands shaped the democratic system that we have inherited. The Chartists, like the Luddites, brought the two democratic narratives head-to-head as they struggled for economics to be subject to popular control, via law-making powers for those affected, versus the agenda to free economics from political control (free trade as the proposed remedy for hardship). Interestingly, the Suffragette movement would later divide along these broad ideological lines, again illustrating the struggle for two very different forms of democracy.

Critically, while these struggles did result in hard-won concessions, the UK (unlike other representative democracies) never experienced a modern revolutionary moment; advances were therefore piecemeal and gradual rather than comprehensive. In other words, elite social forces succeeded in containing revolution and as a result, the existing highly centralised and hierarchical system stayed intact. Representative democracy was grafted onto a system which remains fundamentally monarchic in character, as evidenced by its uncodified constitution, exceptionally high levels of centralisation without serious checks on the executive, an unproportional electoral system, and a hereditary second chamber, an element of which has persisted to this day (Gamble, 1999). Thus, and in keeping with its monarchist roots, it is a central feature of UK democracy that sovereignty is ineluctably located with Parliament, not the people. Dicey’s 1885 examination of British constitutional arrangements was concerned precisely with the question of how to reconcile the embedded and inflexible idea of a sovereign parliament with the ascendant concept of a sovereign people which democracy implied. In the next chapter I will consider how effective that reconciliation has proved.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the American Revolution provides us with at least two very pertinent lessons. Firstly, it helps us to understand that democracy is not a structure or even a singular value. Rather, it is best understood as a claim. How we define it reveals what it is that we are claiming (and vice versa of course). The Federalists were claiming the right to national self-determination but also sought to preserve decision-making as a bounded elite activity. The Anti-Federalists claimed the right of the individual to be represented in the sense of being present in government. They sought to assert the sovereignty of (a section of) the people, not the government.

A secondary lesson is that it teaches us to be inquisitive about what our present-day elites are claiming when they champion the self-same structures that were created to maintain elite rule. Eric Hobsbawm refers to the class solidarity of the English elite, which acted against the spread of the 'appalling' ideas from France (Hobsbawm, 1975:65). A class reading of that expansionist moment for democracy raises the question of why elites have fought against democracy in the past, but Western elites are generally amongst its public champions today. Understanding that representative democracy was designed to maintain elite control allows us to understand what has changed. As we will see in the following chapter, representative democracy appears in this sense to have been something of a success.

The original conception of democracy as equality has been on the losing side of history. Robespierre and the Terror live on more vividly in popular consciousness, linking equality with violence, than either the achievements of the Revolution or even state violence which eclipses the Terror in scale. Hobsbawm, while not underestimating the Terror, refers to it as 'relatively modest by the standards of conservative repressions of social revolution such as the massacres after the Paris Commune of 1871' (Hobsbawm, 1975:68). [17]

The Paris Commune stands as a shining moment in the narrative of democracy as equality: a socialist committee gained power but, though immediately and

[17] Furthermore, as contemporaneous activist-theorist John Thelwall argued during the Terror, 'the excesses and violences in France have not been the consequence of the new doctrines of the Revolution; but of the old leaven of revenge, corruption and suspicion which was generated by the systematic cruelties of the old despotism' (Thelwall, cited by Thompson, 1963:174).

continuously beset by violent state opposition, did not simply rule but called elections. 230,000 people elected the 92 members of the Paris Commune, of which 24 were workers (Mason, 2008:68-9). The Commune was born out of two years of public meetings, in which working people debated ideas and theorised social revolution. It was an anarchist, socialist and feminist struggle for social revolution, and it was crushed within two short months. In the final 'bloody week' of fighting as the Commune was destroyed, between 15 and 17 thousand Parisians were killed, and in the 'official' massacres which followed, historians believe over 30,000 more were summarily shot (Greer, 1966:26; Hobsbawm, 1962:168-9). In the same city during the 18 months of the Terror, 2,639 were guillotined (Greer, 1966:38). Popular violence is more to be feared than elite violence, it seems.

As the American constitutional debates illustrate, today's hegemonic understanding of democracy did not win purely by force. Partly, it has gained ground because its proponents won the terrain of ideas (though of course elites generally have little problem generating decisive coercive power too). Ellen Meiksins Woods describes how elite events are celebrated over moments of popular control or struggles for equality, for example, the 'Glorious Revolution of 1688'[18] and the Magna Carta (Meiksins Wood, 1995:213) over the rich social history I touched on earlier.

Thus the myths which serve the order of egoism live on, the people as mob, the elite state as protector and defence against our baser, selfish tendencies. The histories which carry a vision of a different world are left to gather dust. The very ubiquity of popular assumptions about democracy masks this turbulent history, and can weaken current struggles for greater democracy, indeed for justice, solidarity and equality. Understanding the ideological construction of our taken-for-granted assumptions, arguably myths, about democracy reveals it to be changeable, a social construct we can redesign. The historicity of democracy reveals the possibility of change. Historical contingency denies the inevitability or permanence of the status quo, and – appropriately – foregrounds democratic

[18] A 'revolution' whose democratic credentials consist in forcing the monarch to share power with the aristocracy not with citizens – and which actually asserted the right of lordship to dispose of property and servants at will (Meiksins Wood, 1995:205).

agency. Our active participation changes outcomes. We are neither agents of inexorable forces, nor irrelevant.

As Bauman suggests, we take the ‘folklore’ to be truths, and it is for this reason that a historical understanding represents an opportunity for democratic activists. We can reject these ‘truths’, and articulate our own, which honour different traditions and uphold different values. Of course, democratic ‘truth’ is no more on the side of equality than it is on the side of possessive individualism (in the sense that there is a logic to both narratives). Defining democracy is simply one terrain on which we contest the world we wish to live in; it helps to be clear about what we are fighting for and why – and what we are fighting against. Redefining democracy in keeping with egalitarian values helps us to reset our social destination.

The vital implication is therefore that it makes little sense to be simply ‘pro-democracy’. To be effective, democrats have to be pro a particular kind of democracy, and in this way they champion a particular set of values and understandings implicit in that vision of democracy. We need to be clear what we are claiming, and what we are trying to justify; in other words, what society we are trying to create. Democracy is not a ‘right’ to be granted to us, it is a claim by us. It is a claim for power – but for whom? It can be a claim for justice and equality – it can be a defence of inequality. In assessing and championing different models of democracy today, we have a choice between orienting ourselves towards equality or towards possessive individualism. The democratic models we live under are not neutral, but are part of the history of these traditions. This issue is a vital element of the context for understanding who chooses to be democratically active in the UK today, and why. If our system of democracy is presented as neutral and equally inviting to all, but in fact carries hidden values and social goals, we can begin to understand how and why some actors may be more easily engaged with this particular system than others.

In order to engage a wider spectrum of citizens, and thus a wider spectrum of democratic aims and goals, we need to reclaim the terrain of contesting the meaning of democracy. We need a much more public understanding of the values embedded in the systems we live under, and in possible alternatives. To further this endeavour, we can supplement mainstream democratic histories

and understandings with a rich alternative history of inspiration, a radical democratic tradition which can broaden our current perceptions of what it means to be democratically active.

The aim of this chapter has been to historicise taken for granted truths about democracy which condition our thinking today, and to open up an alternative lens through which to understand the problem of democratic disengagement in the UK today. Chapter 5 will pick up the narrative of equality through one very significant present-day democratic inspiration, Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre, but in the following chapter, I first explore the current UK democratic system in the light of both these orientations, and ask where our 'democratic deficit' actually lies.

CHAPTER 4

CITIZENS OR SUBJECTS: IDENTIFYING THE DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT IN THE UK

It has become something of a truism in the West that people aren't interested in politics, with the idea of 'apathy' providing a convenient shorthand for the impression that many citizens are not actively engaged with the democratic process. This is rooted in strong evidence that increasing numbers regard politics and politicians with a jaundiced eye, many choosing not to vote. Alongside a steady stream of academic research and analysis around this issue (see, for example, Norris, 2011 & 1999; Hay, 2007; Stoker, 2006; Crouch, 2004; Pharr & Putnam, 2000), there is an increasing willingness on the part of politicians to publicly acknowledge the extent of the problem, perhaps brought to a head in the UK by the 2009 expenses scandal. In this vein, Conservative party leader David Cameron began his pre-election conference speech of that year with the words: 'we all know how bad things are: massive debt, social breakdown, political disenchantment' (Cameron, 2009), while in the run-up to the preceding election in 2005, former Foreign Secretary Robin Cook wrote of the 'awkward truth … that the public no longer like the way the major parties do business' (Cook, 2005).

Analysis of the problem varies, but there is a broad consensus that the established Western democracies, including the UK, are suffering from a democratic deficit and resultant crisis of legitimacy. While the doomsday end-of-democracy scenarios of the 1970s (e.g. Crozier *et al*, 1975) have proved unfounded, a variety of serious and negative consequences for democracy are detected or anticipated. These include a loss of accountability and scrutiny, if, as Pippa Norris puts it, 'a disillusioned public will not function as a check on authoritarianism' (Norris, 1999:268), the unequal division of resources as a result of excluded communities (Parry *et al*, 1992:6-9), shriller, less balanced politics in the absence of citizen deliberation (Putnam, 2000:341-2) and a deterioration in the ability of governments to govern effectively, if they cannot command citizen resources and sacrifices (Huntington, 1975:30-32). In other words, there is a clear and prevalent view that disenchantment is real, and it matters.

This ‘democratic deficit’, as it has become known, is of course the primary causal context for the question of what motivates democratic activism. We live under a system which to all appearances *doesn’t* inspire the majority of people to engage in formal democratic citizenship. In order to understand what might make a difference, we need to ask why this is. The difficulty is that while there is widespread agreement on the existence of the problem, there is much greater divergence in terms of analysis. Forming a view on the likely causes of disenchantment is crucial because different perspectives on causes inevitably lead us towards different judgments about what is likely to be effective in revitalising politics, and thus towards different proposed solutions.

Earlier investigations into the existence of the problem included empirical studies such as Almond & Verba’s landmark 1963 survey *The Civic Culture*, alongside analysis such as the 1974 Miller-Citrin debate over whether the evidence suggested dissatisfaction with specific leaders or a more diffuse reduction in support for the system as a whole (Miller, 1974a; Citrin, 1974; Miller 1974b). These have largely given way to explorations of the cause of reduced political trust. Many theories relate to broad ongoing changes in advanced industrial societies such as the impact of globalisation, or declining social capital connected to the increasing individualisation of modern life (for succinct overviews of the theoretical literature, see Hay, 2007; Dalton, 1999; Fuchs & Klingemann, 1995), including a recent spike of interest in ‘depoliticisation’ (reduced citizen engagement as a response to governments placing an ever-increasing range of issues beyond direct political control, see Wood, 2015).

While there is a high level of agreement that far-reaching social changes are implicated in the rise of political disenchantment, perceptions of the relationship between these dynamics are more varied. Crozier, Huntington & Watanuki’s *Crisis of Democracy* report for the Trilateral Commission judged that the problem was unrealistic levels of expectation (Crozier *et al*, 1975), and echoes of this can be heard still (see Stoker, 2006; or for a notably forthright example, Flinders, 2012). A more common contemporary assertion, which similarly implicates citizens as in some way ‘to blame’, suggests that people do not participate because of apathy, understood as a generalised decline in civic engagement (connected to the ongoing individualisation of modern life, as

mentioned above). The most influential articulation of this premise is Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000).

Locating the problem 'with the people' can lead to somewhat bizarre conclusions, for example that the problem for democracy is excessive democracy, and that the required remedy – purportedly to improve democracy – is to reduce demands by the people (see Brittan, 1975; Flinders, 2012). Regarding apathy, the implied solution is of course for people to be less 'apathetic', or (somewhat more positively) for the state to promote and encourage active citizenship.[1] Colin Hay (2007:39-40) refers to this family of interpretations as 'demand-side' theories of political disengagement, and notes that these interpretations are not only widespread amongst political analysts but 'exceptionally convenient' for political elites, who are as a result able to focus attention – and blame – on citizens who fail to participate, rather than their own failure to provide something worth participating in (a possibility which could be inferred from the preceding chapter's analysis).

Conversely, a second group of theorists (including Hay) conclude that political disenchantment indicates a more deep-seated problem with governments' responsiveness, in other words, dissatisfaction with the functioning of democratic institutions. This generates a very different emphasis on fixing the system so that it becomes more responsive to demands. In this vein, Klingemann (1999:32) argues that dissatisfaction with the existing system is not a threat to democracy but a force for improvement, or as Hay (2007:155) puts it, 'democratic polities get the levels of political participation they deserve'. If the public are right to criticise the operation of representative democracy, the implied solution is to improve that operation.[2]

[1] This 'solution' can be found in many UK (and other) government initiatives, and academic analyses. I will return to the promotion of active citizenship in chapter 6, where I look at the trend to participatory initiatives as context for the development of PB in the UK.

[2] Some theorists (including voices espousing this perspective) caution against a problematic strand in this literature, to the extent that it can stray into the 'demonisation of politics and politicians' (Fawcett & Marsh, 2014:176). However, this arguably reflects an assumption that 'politics and politicians' (of the kind we have come to take for granted) are a necessary feature of the system. Thus, Hay (2014:301) suggests that 'if political elites are, indeed, instrumental self-serving utility-maximisers … then depoliticisation is the best we can hope for; if political elites are capable of exhibiting other motivational traits, however, then the scenario is an altogether different one'. The point here for me, akin to the Anti-Federalist view that particular approaches to representative power shape behaviour, is that the idea of 'political elites' is itself problematic. Taking this as a primary concern moves the emphasis away from 'demonisation' and towards fundamental systemic change (as I discuss in this chapter).

For democrats in the more collective and egalitarian tradition explored in the previous chapter, the second perspective is clearly more fruitful than the aspiration to limit disruptive expressions of democratic activism. However, in this chapter I argue that while this distinction is necessary, it is not sufficient. We need to move a stage further, beyond the dichotomy of locating the problem, and thus the solution, in either the people or the system. Reflecting on our two broad narratives of democracy, the central issue is the location of power and sovereignty. Defining the problem as citizen apathy unambiguously locates the democratic deficit with the people. However, while a concern with the responsiveness of the state (which is indubitably well-founded, as this chapter explores) importantly identifies a different location for the deficit, it is crucial to note that a challenge to the location of *sovereignty* is not in fact intrinsic to either approach. As we have seen, a central feature of UK democracy is that sovereignty is ineluctably located with Parliament, not the people. This has very definite implications for the roles of citizens and the state. Within this model, the job of government is to listen and to act. The job of the people is to elect a government, with an ancillary function of informing government and conveying their needs and preferences. This is clearly and instructively set out in the 2001 White Paper *House of Lords: Completing the Reform* (HMG, 2001). This states that 'the settled principles of our democracy' enable 'the people to give a clear and unequivocal answer to the question "Whom do you choose to govern you?"'

Thus, the undeniably vital task of holding government to account, demanding that it listens better and responds more effectively, only goes so far in addressing the problems of our democracy. An alternative approach, with different underpinning values and a more participatory conception of democracy, is to see the citizenry as the appropriate location of power and sovereignty. The job of citizens in this view of democracy is not to influence but to *exercise* power. The job of the state is therefore to facilitate opportunities for collective access to decision-making. If we choose to embrace this narrative of democracy, the essence of the deficit resides centrally in the fact that power and sovereignty are not accessible to the majority of citizens.

The aim of this chapter, as with the last, is to look beneath some of the analysis of the deficit to underlying values and assumptions about democracy and sovereignty in the UK (in the following chapter I will go on to look in more depth

at the values and assumptions inherent in a more participatory understanding of democracy, which does seek to locate sovereignty with citizens rather than the state). I begin with a brief review of the evidence for the deficit, placing this alongside a second body of research on active citizenship outside the formal democratic system. This evidence calls into question the easy verdict of 'apathy' and focuses our attention on why such activism is found outside our democratic system more than within it. With this as context, I explore the implications of the centralised, hierarchical legacy outlined in the previous chapter for democratic activism today, considering the nature of the Westminster model, and the extent to which we can consider it meaningfully democratic. Reflecting on the realities of our democratic system in the light of the two narratives which help us to understand democratic history, I consider the anti-democratic character of neoliberal capitalism: a review which suggests that the current limitations to UK democracy are only too congruent with a democratic history shaped by possessive individualism. To conclude, I return to the question of sovereignty, and reflect on how this perspective informs our attempts to reinvigorate democratic practice.

A DEMOCRATICALLY DEFICIENT PEOPLE?

The idea of the 'democratic deficit' is frequently used to refer to political disenchantment on the part of citizens. There is extensive evidence that the UK democratic system itself is also 'in deficit' (as I will explore later in the chapter), but even on a more limited citizen-focused definition, the evidence for the existence of a deficit is compelling. Commonly cited indicators of the democratic deficit include voter turnout, membership of political parties, trust in politicians, trust in the system (institutions and processes), and citizens' belief in their ability to influence decisions (in other words, to have an effective democratic role). A brief glance at each of these displays a state of affairs within UK politics which democrats should at the least find revealing, though not necessarily troubling.[3]

There have been a considerable number of large-scale studies investigating public attitudes to politics in the UK, which provide important sources of evidence regarding the democratic deficit, and overall add up to a persuasive

[3] Arguably, if it is the case that we are not living under an adequately democratic system, it is a necessary first step towards change that citizens should be aware of that, and be appropriately dissatisfied.

portrait of democratic dissatisfaction.[4] These include the Government-run UK Citizenship Survey, which provides useful evidence of public attitudes, experience and behaviour in relation to politics and democracy for the years 2001-2011,[5] the British Social Attitudes Survey, an independent annual investigation into attitudes and values which began in 1983 and the Citizen Audit, an in-depth ESRC-funded research project. Many theorists have analysed these and similar data sets, offering empirically grounded reviews of the evidence for the deficit in the UK (see for example, Stoker, 2010 & 2006; Hay, 2007; Pattie *et al*, 2004). My aim here is not to replicate this work, but to acknowledge the extensive empirical work which has verified a decline in political engagement and trust over time, or, as Gerry Stoker puts it, a rise in 'anti-politics' (Stoker, 2010:44). What follows is simply a snapshot of the current state of political disengagement, drawing on this comprehensive literature.

The primary single issue most commonly identified with the democratic deficit is the declining level of voter turnout, perhaps because it is the most central to ideas of democratic legitimacy inherent within our model of representative democracy. There is a very high degree of consensus over the evidence for a consistent and long-standing decline in electoral turnout (see for example, Lee & Young, 2013:64; Hay, 2007:13-20; Clarke, 2002: 13-15). Fewer people voted in the 2001, 2005 and 2010 elections than they ever have in the past, with a trough of 59% in 2001, compared to a peak of 84% in 1950 (Lee & Young, 2013:64). Although these figures illustrate rather than prove the decline, they are consistent with all the available evidence for a slow but accelerating trend.[6] While voter turnout is declining globally, the UK's figures are amongst the lowest in the EU,[7] with non-voters significantly outnumbering those who voted

[4] While the UK is the focus of this chapter and indeed this thesis, there are of course many comparable studies and analyses which reflect on political disenchantment globally. It is worth noting that the picture within the UK is very much consistent with trends in similar, 'advanced' democracies. See edited volumes by Norris, 1999, and Pharr & Putnam, 2000, to locate the UK within an international context.

[5] The Survey was cancelled in 2011 by the incumbent Conservative-led administration; with cost given as the reason.

[6] A trend bucked by the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum, which saw a turnout of 84.5%; suggesting a connection between perceived impact and turnout, as this chapter argues.

[7] Declining turnout is observable in across the spectrum of advanced Western democracies. However, while the UK is our focus here, it is worth noting that different political systems do appear to generate different levels of turnout, with social democratic polities generally enjoying a higher level of turnout than market oriented democracies. Comparable levels of decline do not produce a convergence in turnout, rather the differential is maintained (Hay, 2007:15). This is important, as it focuses our attention on both system specific and broader factors. Appropriately, both are considered in this chapter.

for the winning party in the 2001, 2005 and 2010 general elections. Thus, in 2001, 10.7 million people voted Labour and 18 million didn't vote. In 2005, 9.5 million voted Labour and 17 million didn't vote. In 2010, 10.7 million voted Conservative and 15.9 million didn't vote.[8] Perhaps more tellingly yet, these figures conceal a more dramatic decline in voter turnout when disaggregated by age, as older voters are disproportionately represented in electoral turnout (Lee & Young, 2013:71-76; O'Toole *et al*, 2002). The data strongly suggest that, rather than a propensity to vote developing with age, the initial decision to vote or not vote is a remarkably good predictor of lifetime habits, carrying with it the implication that voter turnout will continue to decline.

Turning to more active engagement, while party membership has always been a minority activity, it is not only an expression of citizenship, but also a pool of activists who have traditionally promoted broader engagement with the system (for example encouraging voting), and acted as a link between citizens and their representatives. Thus declining party membership is both an indicator of disenchantment, and potentially an exacerbating factor in terms of wider disengagement – and decline it has, plummeting from 3.8% of the UK electorate in 1983, to just 1% in 2010 (McGuinness, 2012:2).[9]

Crucially, this changing political behaviour is accompanied not by indifference to the practice of politics but by explicit distrust. Politicians as a group are viewed as one of the least trustworthy professions (Pattie *et al*, 2004:37). According to annual surveys conducted by Ipsos/MORI (2013) the number of people who trust politicians to tell the truth hit a low point of 13% in 2009 (the height of the expenses scandal), and has risen no higher than 23% since the surveys began

[8] Figures calculated from electoral statistics available at http://www.ukpolitical.info/Historical.htm.

[9] Membership of the two main parties peaked in the 1950s, with the Conservatives reporting 2.8 million members, and Labour 1 million, though records at this point may have been exaggerated. See McGuinness, 2012, for a brief overview. There is of course an interesting 'sub-plot' relating to the fortunes of smaller parties. For example, in early 2015, there has been a significant surge in Green Party membership, which is arguably linked to the idea of 'different' politics: 'the wider perception that the Greens dare in the name of a better society' (Hutton, 2015). The Green Party itself considers this a causal factor, as the leader Natalie Bennett articulates: 'Green Party membership is soaring [as] more and more people are recognising that the politics of the future doesn't have to look like the politics of the past' (Bennett, 2015). The Green Party is also bucking the trend of youth disengagement; around a quarter of new members are under 30 (Ramsay, 2015). The rise of smaller parties is of course not a new phenomenon (see Copus *et al*, 2009, for a discussion of the issues in relation to UK politics). However, the relevance to the argument I am making here is more about whether citizens' *reasons* for voting for a smaller party relate to reinvigorating politics, than about whether this strategy is likely to be successful (or, indeed, whether it has proved so in the past).

in 1983. More fundamentally, trust is low not only in politicians but in political institutions such as Parliament itself. This rose no higher than 38% across the whole of the Citizenship Survey time-period, again with a low point of 29% in 2009 in the wake of the expenses scandal (DCLG, 2011:10). This finding is supported by other studies including the Citizenship Audit, a third of whose respondents declared themselves strongly dissatisfied with the country's traditional democratic institutions and procedures (Pattie *et al*, 2004:40), while the British Social Attitudes Survey reports that the number of people who say they 'almost never trust governments' has increased from 11% in 1986 to 32% in 2012 (Lee & Young, 2013:690).

Significantly, the evidence demonstrates not only a low level of belief in the ability to influence decisions, but a substantial gap between democratic appetite and experience. In 2011, 74% of Citizenship Survey respondents believed it was important for them to be able to influence local decision-making, but only 38% of respondents actually felt they could; in relation to decisions affecting Britain nationally, just 22% believed they had some influence (DCLG, 2011:2). Other studies echo the finding that few people believe that government takes notice of their opinions, and, more troubling still, suggest that less than half think government listens even to *majority* opinion, or takes decisions in accordance with majority wishes (Pattie *et al*, 2004:43-45). This complicates the possibility of interpreting these figures as inflated by a dissatisfied minority (which would perhaps be an inevitable feature of a majoritarian system). Put simply, many people think it matters that they, the people, should be able to influence decisions, and they think those decisions matter, but they believe they can't influence the decisions. It is hard to say in what sense this could be described as democracy, but it doesn't look much like apathy either.

Also of concern is the evidence that there are differential patterns in all forms of conventional political engagement which mirror social disadvantage. Pattie *et al* found that:

> 'The poorest members of society, manual workers, and those with fewer years in full time education are more likely to be politically inactive, and the richest, those in professional and managerial occupations and the

best educated are more likely to be politically active' (Pattie *et al*, 2004:85).

Thus, we may extrapolate that the current operation of our form of democracy is likely to be skewed towards reinforcing social hierarchies, as opposed to the equal opportunities for political voice which are implied by the ideal of democracy, a conclusion unhappily in keeping with the analysis presented in the previous chapter.

It is worth noting that while there is a broad consensus regarding a marked deterioration in engagement over time, both in the UK and more generally in the West (see Pattie *et al*, 2004:44; Putnam, 2000:31-32; Dalton, 1999), there remains some debate over the extent to which this is a new phenomenon. While not disputing the decline in political engagement, Robert Pinkney quotes a newspaper cutting from 1921 which refers to 'death by bad citizenship' and one from 1946 which assert that 'very few people bother to vote in local elections [and] few could name more than an odd one or two councillors' (Pinkney, 2005:39), with an implied conclusion that perhaps the concern is exaggerated if the situation is little worse now than it has ever been. Challenging this view, Stoker (2010) provides a useful and persuasive overview of changes in political satisfaction since Almond & Verba's study in 1963, concluding that while (low) levels of interest in and knowledge of formal politics remain relatively static, British citizens have over time lost faith in our capacity to influence decisions, and in the capacity of the government to respond.

While the evidence for decline over time is convincing, it is worth reflecting that the contention that there has always been dissatisfaction in no way undermines its importance to the health of our democratic processes. The analysis in the previous chapter not only supports the view that there has never been a golden age of participation, but also that there has never been a golden age of democracy – only an active accommodation between different forces and values, within which the development of representative democracy embodies not only a burgeoning democratic energy but also elite attempts to respond to and defuse this. A decline in trust and engagement is compatible not only with the hypothesis that the practice of politics has worsened but also with the (not necessarily contradictory) hypothesis that the emergence of mass democracy

post World War Two was accompanied by hopes and expectations which were ultimately not fulfilled (an idea inherent in Norris' 1999 edited collection, *Critical Citizens*).[10] The combination of an informed understanding of the origins of representative democracy with an empirically-grounded awareness of the changes in democratic engagement points to a deeper malaise than either 'unrealistic expectations' or 'apathy'.

To conclude this review of evidence relating to engagement, and in order to lay to rest the idea of apathy as a primary factor in democratic disaffection (already problematised by the evidence considered so far), it is worth briefly reviewing a second body of evidence which presents a clear picture of a citizenry active outside the realm of formal politics. The 'demand-side' explanations of disengagement, with their implied judgment – not to say blame – of citizen behaviour, suggest a public whose disengagement from formal politics is typical of their more general social and political disengagement. However, and in contrast to Putnam's highly influential hypothesis that social disengagement generates political disengagement, Newton's contemporaneous review of empirical evidence regarding both political and social trust concludes that there is no strong evidence to suggest that the decline in political capital (i.e. trust) is the result of a decline in social capital (Newton, 1999:186).

It is clear that the verdict of apathy is only one of a variety of interpretations which can be placed on the plain facts of disengagement. To give one example, Ronald Inglehart relates the generational trends in electoral turnout, not to a disengaged youth, but to the emergence of a younger generation which is less deferential to authority, and exhibits a marked decline in trust for hierarchical institutions, but more positively demonstrates higher levels of trust in *people* (Inglehart, 1999:246-247). Similarly, research into young people's conceptions of the political portrays non-participation as a political act; the evidence suggests that if young people do show signs of disengagement, this reflects their perceptions of how politics is organised, as opposed to a lack of interest (O'Toole, 2003:349; see also Henn *et al*, 2005).[11]

[10] In relation to the 'sub-plot' of smaller parties mentioned earlier, it is plausible that their fortunes may also be affected by this dynamic.
[11] This analysis found an expression in popular consciousness via Russell Brand's 2013 New Statesman article, in which he argued that we are disenchanted not apathetic (Brand, 2013).

This approach to the facts of disengagement is supported by evidence about changing, rather than declining, forms of participation. The Citizenship Audit found that citizens 'are engaged in a multiplicity of political activities beyond the traditional; three in every four people are engaged in political activity, defined as attempting to influence rules, laws or policies' (Pattie *et al*, 2004:107). These activities include donations to campaigning organisations, signing petitions and ethical purchasing decisions. The last is at times made light of as atomised or 'lifestyle' politics; however, this is to overlook the fact that boycotts and preferences (such as for fairly traded goods) are a form of collective action, often coordinated by a campaigning organisation whose aims are espoused by their supporters. In a similar vein, the British Social Attitudes survey reports a significant rise in non-electoral participation, such as contacting the media or going on a protest (Lee & Young, 2013:67-68), while Inglehart (1999:42) distinguishes elite-supporting participation, which has fallen, from elite-challenging participation, which has been on the rise since the 1980s (in Dalton's characterisation, 'duty' elements of citizenship are increasingly replaced with 'engagement' norms, particularly amongst younger citizens; Dalton, 2008). It is in keeping with this analysis that the UK has seen a rise in protest movements which often seek to defend the hard-won provisions of the Welfare State, as well as resisting elite visions of economic 'development' (Chesters, 2009:373). This reinforces a picture of changing rather than declining participation, as action on these very mainstream issues moves outside the state into other areas of citizen activity.

The picture at the micro-political level (attempts to influence or challenge in relation to issues such as health and education in our own lives) is also more positive than that at the macro-political level (e.g. policy). In addition, many groups that are under-represented at the macro level, for example Black voices, are comparatively strong at the micro level (Pattie *et al*, 2004:125). Similarly, levels of both formal and informal volunteering on a regular basis (at least once a month) are relatively high, at 25% and 29% respectively in 2010-2011 (DCLG, 2011:9). Corroborating this, the Citizenship Audit found that people's sense of civic obligation encompasses obedience to the state, a willingness to undertake voluntary actions, such as participating in a neighbourhood watch or a local renovation project, and a willingness to engage in civic service, such as going

on a jury or giving blood, but for most does not extend to more formal roles such as local councillor or school governor (Pattie *et al*, 2004:53). Thus the conclusion of the British Social Attitudes Survey's 30 year review appears justified: despite the fact that there are no real signs of recovery in political trust, there are signs of increasing engagement with politics in a variety of forms. Lee & Young, 2013:78). John *et al* (2011) draw an even stronger conclusion based on their analysis of Citizenship Survey data: a lack of political trust positively incentivises alternative forms of civic action.

While this evidence of broader political engagement discredits the easy judgement of apathy, it does not of course refute or even ameliorate the evidence of formal political disengagement. Our task is to understand the growing gap between the numbers willing to engage in formal and informal politics, a central question to which I will return in later chapters, with reference to the experience of Participatory Budgeting in the UK.

The Citizenship Audit team make the point that micro-politics are 'real politics' for many people (Pattie *et al, 2004:*126), the implication being that more formal political arenas feel distant and less relevant.[12] This brings us to a crucial point. In the context of a concern with what motivates people to engage politically, the question of whether we as analysts or observers judge them to be making the 'right' choice about what is effective political action is not the most important issue. This is not to dismiss the importance of thinking strategically about how to achieve our ends politically – simply, it is a different issue. My question here is around what motivates engagement; debates about how best to engage follow this. The important point here is about seeing from the citizen's perspective, rather than the 'system' perspective, an idea I will return to later in the chapter. What matters is that we have evidence of a willingness to engage when it is *felt* (by the protagonist, not a commentator) to be worthwhile (this could be understood in a variety of ways, for example, effective or rewarding).

[12] This judgement is reinforced by Nina Eliasoph's very detailed study of everyday 'political talk' in the US, *Avoiding Politics* (Eliasoph, 1998), which documents the conversation and practices of several groups of US citizens, some socially but not politically active, some active at local level and some involved in issue-based campaigns. Eliasoph concludes that 'apathy' (so-called) is rooted in a sense of powerlessness. For example, the desire to 'keep your belief in democracy afloat' *requires* you to focus on 'close to home' issues and 'not care' about larger issues, because in a democracy you should be able to affect issues you care about (*op. cit*.:82). Similarly, in her classic work, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, Carol Pateman (1970:104) links political apathy with low feelings of political efficacy.

Secondly – and related – we gain a sense that formal political activity is decreasingly felt to be an effective or attractive route to change by an increasing number of people. The following section will examine some key factors which might help explain this attitude.

A DEMOCRATICALLY DEFICIENT SYSTEM?

As I suggested in the introduction to this chapter, the simple but crucial question at the heart of understanding the democratic deficit is this: to what extent are British citizens justified in their dissatisfaction with the UK democratic system? The evidence presented so far indicates disengagement from formal politics but not apathy. In the following section, I consider a number of what Colin Hay would term 'supply-side' causes of disengagement: whether the government actually does what people want, the hierarchical and centralised nature of British democratic structures, and the limited role assigned to citizens within them (including the dynamics of the political party system and the nature of our representation). My focus in this section is on domestic, system-specific issues (I will discuss the extent to which neoliberal capitalism imposes more general constraints on democracy later in the chapter).

First, a caveat: the UK is, by any established definition, a democracy. Leading international indicators for democracy place Britain at or near the summit (Beetham *et al*, 2003:334). We have free and fair elections, rule of law, an active civil society, protection for social and political rights (though in all cases we must of course add the qualifier 'relatively'). However, Beetham's more nuanced qualitative approach to democratic auditing reminds us that democracy cannot be measured as a total good, but rather assessed as a series of 'more or less' continuums over a variety of aspects of democracy (*ibid*.). In other words, democracy is not a yes / no condition. It does not undervalue the importance of hard-won, yet flawed and still threatened democratic rights, to ask if our democracy could be improved. Given the rather self-congratulatory public image of UK democracy (as expressed by Winston Churchill when he said: 'if it be true, as has been said, that every country gets the form of government it deserves, we may certainly flatter ourselves'),[13] my focus here is on the extent

[13] Speech by Winston Churchill to the House of Commons, 15th May 1945, quoted by Wright (2003:2).

to which our system falls short of democratic ideals, in order to understand the extent of legitimate causes for dissatisfaction.

To begin with, let's take the issue of satisfaction with government performance. At the most basic level, if democracy is rule by the people, it is hard to quarrel with the view that 'the people' should be satisfied with what 'we' do. Unfortunately, we do not have to go far to find evidence that there is a significant level of dissatisfaction with government performance. Kenneth Newton and Pippa Norris make a strong case that the declining trust outlined above is related closely to institutional performance (Newton & Norris, 2000), a view supported by Arthur Miller and Ola Listhaug's analysis that declining trust relates to perceptions of outcomes, specifically procedural justice (in other words, the perception that the system generates unfair outcomes) (Miller & Listhaug, 1999). Certainly, we can reasonably claim that the UK government regularly takes action which does not enjoy majority support. In his *Democratic Audit*, David Beetham (2003) refers to 'policy disasters' which flout public wishes, in making the case that the UK government is strong but not effective. To take one very pertinent example, which I will revisit later in the chapter, at the height of the privatising Thatcher administration, a majority opposed the sell-off, favoured increased taxes and wanted properly run and financed public services (Kavanagh, 1987:292-297).[14] In a similar vein, the 2014 British Social Attitudes survey found widespread support for the idea that any democracy has a commitment to protect all its citizens against poverty, but that more than 1 in 3 (38%) don't believe the British government does this (Butt & Fitzgerald, 2014).

However, it is important to be careful here. The picture is complicated, and it is vital to disentangle support for particular administrations from the wider issue of support for how our particular democratic system operates in practice. Rather than presenting a raft of detail around particular policies, I want to make a somewhat broader point. Russell Dalton distinguishes a healthy (representative) democratic cycle of dissatisfaction leading to new leaders and a temporary confidence in government, which gives way to dissatisfaction again, from a more deep-seated scepticism (Dalton, 1999:62). While he argues persuasively

[14] The figures quoted earlier, demonstrating how non-voters consistently outnumber supporters of the winning party, help explain how this situation can arise (as well as shedding light on the fact that many people do not believe that government listens even to majority opinion).

that the evidence does support a verdict of increased scepticism, I suggest that from a democratic point of view, even the cycle itself is inherently problematic. If this is an ongoing situation, where a change of government does not ultimately result in citizens' desired outcomes, then it is reasonable to see this as a structural concern. Moreover, this issue is clearly exacerbated in a situation where the major parties offer a limited range of policy choices, as has been the case in the UK since the mid-1980s.

The cycle may be a necessary part of representative democracy, but it is a central tenet of my overall argument that we don't have to confine our judgments about the health of democracy to the idea of healthy representative democracy. In the light of this, it is possible to interpret the cycle as simply relating to our *belief* that what we have is: a) democracy and therefore b) the best possible system of government. In later chapters, I explore the extent to which new ideas about what is possible, indeed about what democracy is, have the potential to transform this situation.

The second 'supply-side' issue I want to address offers some perspective on why many people may be dissatisfied with government performance. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the UK democratic system is majoritarian rather than proportional, maintained through a winner-takes-all voting system and a limited balance of powers. The executive gains the full resources of the state once a Commons majority is obtained.[15] This is because, within Parliament, there is a striking absence of constitutional checks and balances (which might represent a wider spectrum of views) on the executive.

Matthew Flinders and Alexandra Kelso describe how 'the near complete fusion of the executive and legislature existed by design rather than by accident; the parliamentary state was designed and intended to be a power-hoarding rather than power-sharing polity' (Flinders & Kelso, 2011:254), further spelling out that:

> 'Parliamentary government, as it emerged out of the 19th century, was explicitly intended to deliver 'strong government'. As a result, the House

[15] Tony Wright (2003: 59) discusses how this strong executive power is combined with weak 'delivery mechanisms'. In other words, despite its strength, it's hard for government to engineer the outcomes it wishes to see. Detailed analysis of the effectiveness of government is somewhat outside the scope of this study – my concern here is rather with the democratic legitimacy of government – however, it is easy to see how obvious power without clear delivery on outcomes can contribute to a prevalent lack of faith in politics.

> of Commons was never empowered, resourced or intended to exert a constant or arduous role in relation to scrutinising the executive; it was designed to wield a latent power that would only be deployed in the most serious cases of error or omission.' (*Op. cit*.:263)

In their view, the 'constitutional tensions and reforms of the mid to late 19th century established a legislature that was designed and intended to play a largely acquiescent role in all but the most extreme circumstances' (*op. cit*.:259). As discussed in the previous chapter, this is a system in which democratic legitimacy has been grafted onto a power structure which remains monarchic in character. The role of citizens is therefore severely limited. It's worth emphasizing that the idea of 'strong government' is inherent in the system, not simply a matter of party politics (see Amery, 1948 & Laski, 1951, for Conservative and Labour post-war defences of concentrated executive power).

Unusually, in the UK, the executive power thus secured includes absolute power over the constitution. Contrary to popular wisdom, we don't have an unwritten constitution; rather, our constitution has been written in a piecemeal and haphazard fashion over the centuries and across many different pieces of legislation. This has two important implications. Firstly, it is all but impossible for ordinary citizens to disentangle, understand, and more importantly, *use* the constitution as a check on the executive. Secondly, constitutional laws have no special status – any government can unmake constitutional laws at any time, a state of affairs which grants British governments an unmatched degree of power relative to most other democracies. Tony Wright reminds us that in the UK, the 'balance of powers' historically refers to the Commons, the Lords and the monarch (Wright, 2003:19), rather than the rather more democratically justifiable executive, legislature and judiciary. As an academic and serving MP, Wright suggests that the question of protection against arbitrary government remains central (Wright, 2003:22). As we have seen, what our system represents above all else is a sovereign Parliament. Dicey's 19th century attempt to reconcile this with the idea of a sovereign people – that a sovereign Parliament will only do what a sovereign people wants – is immediately problematised by the earlier discussion around dissatisfaction, and still more so by a look at what 'majority' means in the context of UK politics.

The ‘first-past-the-post’ voting system means that it generally only requires a minority to vote for a winning candidate at constituency level. Thus, in 2010 the Conservative Party won 47% of the seats with a 36% share of the vote; even more troublingly, in 1951 they gained a majority of seats and formed the government despite winning over a million fewer votes than the Labour Party, and in 1974 Labour formed the government despite polling fewer votes than the Conservatives (G Thompson, 2010:128). When we include non-voters in the majority who did not support the government, figures are as follows. In 2010, the Conservative Party’s support was around 23.4% of the electorate, given a 65% turnout. In other words, 3 out of every 4 eligible voters – 34.9 million out of an electorate of 45.6 million – did not vote for the winning party (who then wield extensive power with limited checks and balances). In 2005, this figure was 34.6 million out of an electorate of 44.2 million, and in 2001, 33.6 million people out of an electorate of 44.4 million did not vote for the winning party. Even in the case of Labour’s landslide 1997 election success, 30.2 million out of an electorate of 43.7 million did not vote Labour.[16]

The situation is compounded at Parliamentary level, as extensive governing power is then delivered into the hands of the winning party, regardless of the size of their share of the vote, via a concentration of centralised executive power in a single party cabinet (Lijphart, 1999:10-18). Opposition minorities (or indeed majorities) may be disenfranchised twice, within their constituencies, and then again within Parliament. If, following the narrative presented in the previous chapter, we take an egalitarian, collective approach to democracy, then all this is quite damning. The highly centralised and hierarchical character of UK democracy additionally generates a number of corollary issues, which also serve to illustrate the limits to UK democracy.

The essence of a centralised system is that power (and thus sovereignty) is held at a distance from the citizen. In the UK context, the first stage of this remove can be found in the relative powerlessness of local government. While local government was never a significant alternative power-base to national government, its further incapacitation was a facet of the Thatcher ‘revolution’ which is entirely in keeping with the embedded commitment to strong

[16] Figures calculated from electoral statistics available at http://www.ukpolitical.info/Historical.htm.

government (despite the neoliberal anti-state rhetoric), and which was not interrupted by New Labour (Jenkins, 2007; Lowndes, 2002). This centralisation is reinforced by an accelerating trend towards non-elected local governance in fields such as health, development and education, overseen from the centre, at the expense of elected local government (Wilson & Game, 2006:16-17).

Moving even further from central government to the level of individual citizens, the role prescribed for us within the system is predictably limited. We have already seen that relatively small numbers of individual votes are needed to secure a powerful national governing majority. For opposition voters in secure constituencies, this effectively devalues their primary individual exercise of democratic authority. Beyond this very symbolic disenfranchisement, there are particular features of the system which further reduce the democratic salience of the individual citizen, as I will discuss below. These include: the democratic limitations of political parties, the 'myth of the manifesto', the nature of political representation in the UK, and the existence of a permanent political class.

Turning first to the role of political parties, it is fair to say that in the UK we are used to understanding competition between parties as synonymous with the practice of democratic politics. The democratic rationale for party politics is the facilitation of collective action, perhaps most famously articulated by Edmund Burke, who said in defence of parties, 'when bad men combine, the good must associate' (Burke, 1770). In twentieth century UK politics, party politics has had a class character, with hugely important democratic outcomes. For example, the formation of the Labour party shaped the development of mass democracy which played a vital role in the post-war creation of the welfare state. However, as Vernon Bogdanor (2004) describes, not only has the two-party system had a relatively short existence but its creation was actively fostered and supported by the political elites of the day, the significant implication being that other modes of democratic organisation were (and are) possible, even within the context of British representative democracy. As with any historical democratic construct, the party political model has embedded tendencies.

In this vein, we can identify a number of anti-democratic biases. Primarily, the internal democracy of parties is critical. If, as Burke implies, political parties aid democracy because they facilitate the translation of individual aims into the

public policy-making forum, then the extent to which the internal processes of the parties are democratic matters. While internal decision-making between parties of course varies, there is a wider dynamic, in that the representative functions of parties are declining relative to their institutional functions (Bartolini & Mair, 2001), a process of professionalisation which shifts parties from organisations rooted in civil society, to being a privileged part of the machinery of government (Katz & Mair, 1995). In others words, they increasingly serve the needs of government, rather than the needs of citizens. This problematises their declared role as a conduit for citizens' democratic participation. Indeed, the ostensible role of parties as formulating policies 'in response to the desires of their mass membership' is arguably a myth – the evidence has long suggested that no democracy does or could function this way (Brittan, 1975:133). This is supported by the displacement of internal democratic mechanisms by the tools of political marketing and 'brand creation' (Scammell, 1999, 2007), illustrating how party politics is characterised by a top-down process of dissemination and persuasion rather than a bottom-up process of agenda-formation.

Furthermore, the party system roots its claim to legitimacy in the doctrine of the mandate and the manifesto. In other words, democracy is served by party-controlled government because, when in government, parties enact the policies in the manifesto they fought the election on. Of course, the 'package deal' which the manifesto implies obscures any knowledge of which policies are supported and which not (Wright, 2003:72), illustrating how wide the gulf between the position of the individual citizen and the practice of government may be.

Similarly, the operation of accountability mechanisms is relatively inaccessible to ordinary citizens. Flinders & Kelso describe a complex, fluid environment 'beneath the observable 'reality' of parliamentary parties': informal channels including party caucuses, all-party groupings and ad-hoc meetings between ministers and members. They argue that 'the outward appearance of a strong and stable executive governing through a pliant and docile legislature may on occasion therefore veil the existence of deep parliamentary divisions that are played out largely beyond the public eye and are not recorded in the official legislative record' (Flinders & Kelso, 2011:262). While for Flinders & Kelso, this indicates that accountability is working better than we might think, I suggest that

to the extent this is an accurate description, it captures how the individual citizen is excluded from an active role in holding government to account.

As I have said, my aim here is not to suggest that political parties serve no democratic function, but rather to highlight the limitations of processes and structures which the public imagination can too often equate completely with democracy. We may consider the nature of representation in the same spirit. Firstly, representation in the UK is closely tied to the party system. This creates a danger that MPs are under pressure to represent their party rather than their constituents (particularly in the light of the issues described above). Thus, in 1997, new prime minister Tony Blair told first-time Labour MPs that their job was to be 'ambassadors' of government in their constituencies (Wright, 2003:82) clearly illustrating the expected direction of representation.[17]

Secondly, the structural distance between representatives and citizens has at least two consequences which could be said to compound the systemic democratic deficit. Arguably, it is this distance which enables the media to play such a pivotal role in shaping political opinions (Herman & Chomsky, 1994; Stevens & Karp, 2012). The rise of 'celebrity politics' is an associated development (Marsh *et al*, 2010). An obvious corollary to the enhanced role of the media is the ascendant power of 'spin doctors' in directing political activity, which in turn privileges presentation over policy (Moloney, 2001), further reducing opportunities for the individual citizen to discursively influence democratic agendas. This is an important distinction. Political parties remain voter-focused in the sense that they are responsible to public opinion, but in this interaction, the voter is passive. This is very different from having the opportunity to actively participate in political agenda-formation (James Fishkin, in his 1995 book *The Voice of the People*, suggests that Western systems of representative democracy produce ill-informed publics, and then listen to them).

In a similar vein, we can also see that adversarial politics are not an aberrant feature of this situation but an innate aspect of it. Such 'yah boo' politics are

[17] A vignette from my research in Newcastle illustrates the distance which the party system creates between the state and the citizen, and its inherent representational difficulties. A local PB activist who had previously been a councillor described how people think she's still a councillor, and she has to explain that she isn't, '*because nae bugger voted for me*!' This prompted the following responses from her fellow citizens: '*it wasn't you they didn't vote for, it was the labour*' … '*I mean, we were just sorry that it was your turn*' (interview 26, group interview, Newburn working group members, 16/02/2009.).

often presented as a cause of dissatisfaction, when this is more accurately understood as an *effect* of the democratic limitations of the system itself. Significantly, this has a bearing not only on democratic participation but on democratic learning, too. By and large, we really don't learn to discuss, form opinions, to *be* democratic citizens in a meaningful sense, from the customary behaviour of our politicians. Barber critiques political talk in adversarial systems as reducing communication to the articulation of interests rather than the 'difficult art of listening', indeed to a form of aggression (Barber, 1984:174-175). I will return to the question of how we learn democracy – as well as *what* we learn (and what we could learn) – in later chapters.

To summarise this family of issues, which indicates the systemic limits to the role of the individual citizen, it is only necessary to say that a permanent and professional political class is an intrinsic element of the UK democratic system. It is instructive to recall that this feature was actively debated with regard to the US constitution. Indeed, the Federalist proposal that the role of citizens should be ratification not decision-making was castigated by the Anti-Federalists as antithetical to democracy. The essence of this situation is that it locates political agency *outside* the people as a whole. Politics is what politicians do. It is not, by extension, what citizens do. This is spelled out by Schumpeter, who echoes the Federalists when he insists that 'the voters outside of parliament must respect the division of labour between themselves and the politicians they elect … they must understand that once they have elected an individual, political action is his business and not theirs' (Schumpeter, 1943:295).

Schumpeter's portrayal of politicians as neither ideologues nor as representatives, but as professionals who deal in votes as businessmen deal in oil (*op. cit*.:285) remains both a descriptive and normative account of Western representative democracy. This underlines the presumed location of power, agency and sovereignty embedded within the system. Thus, we can see the central relevance of this issue to our question of democratic motivation. It has been argued that the negligible role for individual citizens produces a 'rationally ignorant' public; there is no incentive to inform ourselves, because our input does not make a significant difference (Fishkin, 1995:21). Chomsky reaches a different conclusion with similar consequences, describing how voter turnout in Haiti dropped to 5% following the external imposition of neoliberal 'reforms' – he

suggests as a result not of their ignorance but rather their clear understanding of the value of their participation (Chomsky, 1999:106-9). Taking a 'citizen-eye view' of the democratic system, is it rational for me to participate if I cannot make a connection between my participation and the social and political outcomes that I care about?

Before I move on to the question of wider constraints on our democracy, it is worth reiterating two of the system-design issues explored in the preceding chapter. Firstly, the underlying rationale for representation reflects belief in a politically incompetent mass prone to hysteria and error. This is a system rooted in deep scepticism about citizens' ability to take a more active role. Secondly, it is a system designed to contain rather than facilitate the collective exercise of political freedom. The primary role which is allocated to citizens, that of voter, is inescapably individual. The opportunity for collectivity is formally regulated through political parties, and as we have seen, there are limits to this too, in terms of active mass participation. Both of these fundamental orientations – elitism and individualism – emphasise the location of sovereignty and power with Parliament rather than 'the people'.

DEMOCRACY AS POSSESSIVE INDIVIDUALISM?

Up to this point I have discussed domestic, structural limits to democracy. The impact of neoliberal economic globalisation is a separate and much discussed aspect of the democratic deficit (see for example, Gould, 2010; Crouch, 2004; McMurtry, 2002; Leys 2001). Over the time period in which we have seen a marked deterioration in indicators of democratic health, we have also witnessed the global expansion of capitalist financial organisation, and the corresponding extension of consumerist norms into social life (Streeck, 2012). While a detailed examination is outside the scope of this study, I will briefly review the perceived relationship between capitalism and democracy (ideologically speaking, neoliberal economic globalisation is not a new phenomenon, but simply writes large existing ideological truths and value-driven practices), in order to make three key points which are particularly pertinent to an exploration of the UK democratic deficit.

Firstly, the democratic deficit has been facilitated by neoliberal doctrines, in particular the false separation of politics and economics. Secondly, perhaps the

most insidious aspect of this neoliberal folklore is not that is either ‘true’ or ‘false’, but that it can be a self-fulfilling prophecy (if we let it). Finally, there is a *conscious* anti-democratic agenda at work here. These three points are important because they indicate possibilities for intervention, as opposed to understanding neoliberal economics (both domestic and globalising) as an external and impervious limit to democracy.

For much of the twentieth century, formal democracy has commonly been understood to be dependent upon capitalist economics. As David Beetham (1997:77) puts it: ‘the conventional wisdom in Anglo-American political science … is that a market economy is a precondition for democratic political institutions, and that therefore economic liberalization and political democratization as processes go hand-in-hand’. This argument is based on the observation that all liberal democracies coexist with market-oriented systems of private enterprise (Lindblom, 1977:161-2).

Classically, the argument has been made that affluence is a prerequisite for democracy, because ‘only in a wealthy society in which relatively few citizens lived in real poverty could a situation exist in which the mass of the population could intelligently participate in politics and could develop the self-restraint necessary to avoid succumbing to the appeals of irresponsible demagogues’ (Lipset, 1959:75). Thus, in his influential 1959 article, ‘Some social requisites for democracy: economic development and political legitimacy’, Seymour Lipset focused on the role that relative prosperity and education (understood to be generated by economic development) played in developing the talents of the ‘lower strata’. These citizens were seen as a threat to democracy because of their tendency to revolt and extremism. The orthodox view of this relationship emphasises the ‘middle-class values’ produced by capitalism (as noted in the previous chapter: Fukuyama’s ‘small, elite group’ learning ‘habits of democratic contestation and compromise’, 1992:219). A later version of this argument suggests that democracy is impossible without private ownership, because private property provides the only secure basis for political opposition and intellectual freedom (Schlesinger, 1997:7). Perhaps more bluntly, Joseph Schumpeter’s *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1943) makes the case that capitalism fosters a ‘workable’ democracy which rests on competition by

politicians for the people's vote, rather than an idealistic, and in his view unstable and unrealistic, vision of democracy as rule by the people.

This orthodoxy notwithstanding, a more critical perspective has always coexisted, which has emphasised the co-dependent development of a liberal democracy which serves the needs of capitalist economics (classically expressed by Ralph Miliband's *The State in Capitalist Society*, 1969). A related perspective highlights the role of the organised working class (accelerated by capitalism) in demanding democracy (Rueschemeyer *et al*, 1992; see also EP Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, 1963). Thompson's detailed historical study challenges the assumption that wealth and democracy are causally linked, documenting instead the detrimental impact of economic 'development' on living standards, and the relationship between this and increased demands for democracy. This view accords with the analysis presented in the previous chapter: democracy as a site of contestation between different social pressures. The basic tenet of this critical case is that key elements of capitalist ideology (exacerbated within neoliberal formulations) are fundamentally anti-democratic (for two detailed analyses, see Dryzek, 1996; Meiksins Wood, 1995). In the interests of brevity, I will concentrate on three features: the ideological separation of politics and economics, neoliberal value hierarchies, and assumptions within capitalism about human nature.

The defining principle of capitalism is that politics and economics are separate spheres, a post-feudal tradition of allowing market forces to operate freely, which stretches back to the times of Adam Smith (Smith tended to the view that the social consequences of unrestrained markets were a necessary price for the creation of national wealth).[18] This principle immediately raises a number of structural questions, such as the appropriateness of wealth creation as a primary social goal, and debates over the nature of the relationship between the liberal markets and wealth creation. However, my concern here is more narrowly with the ways in which it is fundamentally problematic from a democratic point of view.

[18] It is of course worth remembering that Adam Smith considered his two major works, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) and *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), as parts of an integral whole. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* deals with Smith's conception of human nature and the need for social control (including internalised control in the form of moral norms) *beyond* the market.

Chomsky puts it bluntly, the basic neoliberal rule that government should get out of the way of the market implies that, insofar as the government is democratic, people should get out of the way too (Chomsky, 1999:20). As Ralph Miliband (1969:52-53) and others have argued, the depoliticisation of economic life is in fact the clandestine importation of economics into public life (this underpins a key strand of thought in recent depoliticisation debates; see Wood, 2015; Foster *et al*, 2014; Flinders & Wood, 2014).[19] In other words, the case that economics are outside the realm of politics is a quintessentially political agenda to remove very significant areas of life (for example, wages, standards of living, working conditions and material inequality) from direct public control.

This is facilitated by an intrinsic hierarchy of values, the promotion of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness to the suppression of other values. Clearly, there are other values we can choose to judge action and policy against, such as justice, inclusion or equality, but these are relegated within the hegemonic discourse. There is an unambiguous conflict here, of the ends we strive for, not merely the means by which we hope to get there, as public choice theorists (who advocate the application of neoliberal economic hypotheses to the field of politics) themselves agree. William Mitchell (1988:50) identifies that criticism of public choice theory rests on a clash of values: efficiency versus fairness. While a full discussion of neoliberal values is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to note the implication that if certain values are mandated as the yardstick for judging public policy (see Pollitt, 1990), then it is clear that a range of options are being artificially held outside the arena of democratic contestation.[20] For example, with regard to water or welfare, should economy or justice be the touchstone value? Citizens may debate the answer to this question, but there is clearly a debate to be had, and in a democracy this should not be suppressed.

We can see this clearly via the issue of privatisation. Nationalisation is a democratic statement about the right to debate, control and – crucially – *choose the aims of* economic production and public services. Privatisation insists that the ends must be those determined according to capitalist values, such as

[19] Within this literature, Fawcett & Marsh (2014) challenge the widespread assumption that such 'depoliticisation' is to a significant degree a 'new' phenomenon.
[20] Thus, for example, a World Trade Organisation ministerial declaration notes that the WTO will not take into account values other than trade and economics, such as the preservation of rural life, environmental concerns or animal welfare (Singer 2002:70).

efficiency over fairness. For example, a privatised rail system has an imperative to cover costs and generate profit. Democratic control of the railways permits the choice to provide a service to isolated communities at a cost met by the taxpayer. Similarly, Nick Clegg, deputy Prime Minister in the coalition government which insists 'there is no alternative' to the cuts, focuses on administration not agenda-setting when he says: ‘given that Local Authorities are being asked, financially speaking, to do more with less, we should give them much more freedom as possible [*sic*] over *how* they do it’ (Clegg, 2010, emphasis added). This illustrates the fact that removal of policy areas from democratic control does not reduce the political salience of economics, but on the contrary means that the doctrines of mainstream economics become a more powerful (because unmediated) force in people’s lives. Democracy is properly understood as a series of genuine dilemmas about what action to take. And yet the economic model of politics cedes the determination of outcomes to the market – eroding conscious political control over outcomes.

In short, democracy requires us to believe that economic structures are political and subject to our control. Capitalism requires us to believe that economics are governed by natural laws, non-political and not subject to our control. Thus, a more substantive view of democracy inspires us to understand economics, not as separate from politics, but as the proper business of politics.[21] Conversely, a narrow view of democracy is in danger of relegating government to being the political arm of business. Socialist politician and founder of the NHS, Aneurin Bevan, provides a striking image to illustrate the poverty of this view: if government has responsibility without power, ‘its authority is reduced to that of a public mourner for private economic crimes’ (Bevan, 1952:49). Taking a view of democracy which places equality centre-stage, it is clear that we have the option to make differently normative theoretical choices about economics.

It is worth noting at this point, following the discussion in the last chapter, that forming a judgment on whether you see democracy and capitalism as compatible very much rests on your definition of democracy. Writing from a neoliberal viewpoint, John Mueller (1992:984) argues that ‘democracy has been able to become established and accepted because, despite the assertions of

[21] A discussion that is at the heart of the study of ‘political economy’, a subject recognised by both Hayek and Marx.

many of its advocates, in practice it has very little to do with political equality – indeed, effectively it relies on, and celebrates, political inequality'. Indeed, he acknowledges that the same 'virtuous and talented, and wealthy and wellborn' people are in power, and describes the emphasis placed on 'the occasional political success of upstarts raised in log cabins' as the work of 'democratic myth-builders' (*op.cit*.:998). Similarly, Schumpeter (1943:262 & 283) suggests that 'the typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field … he becomes a primitive again; … party and machine politicians are simply the response to the fact that the electoral mass is incapable of action other than a stampede'. On these grounds, he opposes the idea of democracy as rule by the people and instead defends a conception of democracy as a political marketplace which primarily serves to remove the people from the sphere of power, relegating them to choosing (and explicitly *not* controlling) their rulers (*op. cit*.:269-283).

It is perhaps necessary to remind ourselves at this point that these extracts are taken from defences of democracy which seek to demonstrate the compatibility between democracy and capitalism. While it is true that there may be more nuanced defences of liberal democracy, these older and blunter formulations are useful to examine because they expose the underlying values behind precepts which have not been abandoned. It is rather too easy to assume that the hegemonic truth that (liberal) democracy and capitalist economics are compatible retains something of the idea of more substantive equality implied by popular understandings of democracy.

Democracy, as our society defines and understands it, is *within* the capitalist system. It is not above or outside it. In essence, this gives the capitalist state a function which is ideologically *not accessible* to democratic control. In removing hugely significant policy areas from democratic control, capitalist ideological formulations therefore exacerbate the 'limited role' for citizens discussed earlier, with the same logical implications for participation.

Thus far, I have sought to draw out the anti-democratic quality of capitalist ideological tenets. It is also worth reflecting briefly on how persuasive they are as a worldview, as context for the discussion of alternative understandings of democracy, which follows in chapter 5. While this topic can only receive the

most cursory treatment here, it is important to problematise these hegemonic ideas, because if these assumptions do not accurately reflect the world we live in, then it is practical, instead of hopelessly idealistic, to imagine alternatives. It is no accident that 'there is no alternative' is a neoliberal rallying cry.

Though consciously presented as 'common-sense', the case has been strongly made that public choice interpretations of politics are both theoretically and empirically flawed (Hay, 2007:101-109; Self, 1993; Dunleavy, 1991). More significantly perhaps, public choice theorists themselves acknowledge that their theoretical models do not explain the empirical evidence (for example voting patterns), and devote time to explaining why this might be (Mueller, 1989:364-368; Brittan, 1998:107). Orrell (2010:129) observes that a great many model-based papers don't even mention economic data. A theory that does not easily explain readily observable phenomena cannot claim to be descriptive, but should be clearly regarded as normative.

While political theorists do offer more sophisticated analyses of economic behaviour, it is important to understand that this masks the fact that economic risk models are based *precisely* on these simplistic assumptions (as are public choice models). Orrell (2010) describes how neoclassical economics are based on an explicit comparison with Newtonian physics, presenting people as independent particles which bump into each other but are otherwise unchanged. The mathematical models of both neoliberal political theory and mainstream economics rest on this assumption, to facilitate the mathematical prediction and analysis of human behaviour, just as physical patterns are predicted. To the extent that we do not believe human behaviour works like this, we should not believe in the 'laws' of economics, and arguably we should not believe in the approaches to democracy that flow from them.

Given the basis of the models, it is perhaps no surprise to observe that the world does not in fact behave as mainstream economic forecasters expect it to, as illustrated by the 2008 financial crisis. While some alternative economists did anticipate a crisis (see Shutt, 1998), according to mainstream economic laws, the events of 2008 *should not have happened*. The chief financial officer at Goldman Sachs reported that events which would not be expected to happen once in the duration of the universe happened every day for a week (Orrell,

2010:2). For investor George Soros, an industry insider, the crash happened precisely because powerful people acted as if the myths were true:

> ‘The salient feature of the crisis is that it was not caused by some external shock like OPEC raising the price of oil. It was generated by the financial system itself. This fact - a defect inherent in the system - contradicts the generally accepted theory that financial markets tend toward equilibrium and deviations from the equilibrium occur either in a random manner or are caused by some sudden external event to which markets have difficulty in adjusting. The current approach to market regulation has been based on this theory, but the severity and amplitude of the crisis proves convincingly that there is something fundamentally wrong with it.’ (Soros, 2008)

Accordingly, there is convincing evidence that these assumptions mislead us about what works in terms of governance. Joseph Stiglitz, former Chief Economist of the World Bank asserts that ‘globalisation today is not working for many of the world’s poor; it is not working for much of the environment; it is not working for the stability of the global economy’ (Stiglitz, 2002:214). Indeed, the market itself does not work as ‘ideal’ markets are said to, as evidenced by market failures (Gould, 2010:55 & 58) and the persistence of values other than economy and efficiency, for example fairness (Self, 1993:201-203). It is therefore questionable whether a ‘political market’ (the public choice vision of politics as a market in which political parties and government departments are understood as analogous to companies) would work in ideal fashion either. Furthermore, to the extent that neoliberal economic postulates are opinions rather than laws, democrats should emphatically reject their removal from democratic control (and so increase the salience of citizen participation).

Likewise, research into the assumed truth that governmental freedom is severely curtailed by neoliberal economic globalisation has produced results that are perhaps surprising. Cooke & Noble (1998) found a *positive* correlation between levels of foreign direct investment with high education and wages (arguably linked to productivity), and a negative correlation between investment and low education and wages. Similarly, Hay observes a high correlation between ‘stateness’ (state expenditure as % of GDP) and financial openness,

concluding that the character of one's labour market and the generosity of one's welfare state remain matters of domestic political choice (Hay, 2007:145-6). Layna Mosley's detailed empirical study (2005) suggests that while neoliberal economic globalisation has caused convergence on the size of deficits, richer countries retain control over taxation and welfare (poorer countries have less autonomy due to the constraints imposed by international financial institutions).

This evidence is in keeping with the analysis that, rather than markets constraining states, the opposite is in fact true, international markets couldn't operate without the acceptance by most politicians that intervention is to be eschewed (Gould, 2010:59). Thus, John Gray (1998) provides a detailed description of the political will which is necessary to construct and sustain free markets, and Foster *et al* (2014) argue that economic depoliticisation (moving economic decisions outside the acknowledged realm of political deliberation, as discussed above) consciously masks a 'rolling forward' of the state.

This is of course also reflected at the domestic level, as capitalism requires the state to protect markets (see for example, Gould, 2010; Miliband, 1969). This includes: keeping social 'order', competing internationally, inducing businesses to invest, and securing finance for all these activities. In practice, these things take precedence over alternative, democratically expressed, goals (Dryzek, 1996:37). John Gray describes the centralisation of power that Thatcher's government, though publicly committed to a smaller state, found necessary in order to construct a free market, not least because only a strong, centralised state can wage war on the institutions (for example, unions) which traditionally stand between individual citizens and market forces (Gray, 1998:26; Dryzek, 1996:68). This increases the distance between the citizen and the operation of power, and fosters the ability of government to pursue a predetermined agenda.

In keeping with this analysis, Helen Thompson (2010) identifies that the 2008 crisis revealed what had always been true: states have regulatory power they choose not to use. Thus, Mosley (2005) concludes that the 'race to the bottom' is more likely to be linked to a normative agenda to shift decision-making from the political arena to the market (or a scapegoat to cover policy mistakes), than the result of necessity. To the extent that this is true, Western governments (including Britain) did not reluctantly and regretfully find their democratic hands

tied; they ceded – and go on ceding – control of the economy by choice, and to the extent that they do so, they further embed an individualistic, marketised understanding of democracy to the detriment of a collective, egalitarian vision.

Gould (2010:63-64) specifically attacks the Left for giving up this ground, and accepting the doctrine rather than presenting a meaningful alternative. Alongside ideological commitment, there is a strong case that politicians choose power without responsibility, in order to create an electoral shield against the consequences of their policy choices (Burnham, 2014, 2001; Murphy, 2011). It is easy to see how this coheres with a professional political class for whom political success is a goal in itself (prompting the question of whether this might be different in the context of a more citizen-based, participatory democracy).

As a last reflection on the extent to which neoliberal economic globalisation narrows our sphere of democratic action, we may take note of the instances in which the elites who promote these 'truths' flout the rules in their own cases (Chomsky, 1999:30-39; Self, 1993:198-201; Bevan, 1952:67). Stiglitz (2002:6-7) describes his experiences at the World Bank; the West pushed poorer countries to eliminate trade barriers while keeping up their own, declined to open up their own markets to developing countries, retained quotas on multiple goods from textiles to sugar, and continued to subsidise their own agriculture while insisting the poor eliminated their subsidies. The fundamental importance of this reflection is that democratic choices *are* possible, but there is a critical question over who is encouraged to make them within existing political systems.

This connects to the next point I want to make about the anti-democratic dynamics of a neoliberal framework for democracy. As I have said, an essential issue is not whether economic rationality is true or false, but that it can to a certain extent be self-fulfilling. I have argued that what we understand by democracy is not given but is shaped by historical struggles. We are born into an ideological inheritance which we can shape but which also shapes us. This is also true of our conceptions of citizenship, and at a fundamental level, our own human nature. I can put it no more eloquently than Aneurin Bevan, who describes his formative experiences as a young miner in a South Wales colliery:

> 'My concern was with the one practical question, where does power lie in this particular State of Great Britain, and how can it be attained by the

> workers? … The circumstances of our lives made it a burning luminous mark of interrogation. Where was power and which the road to it? It will be seen at once that the question formulated itself in different fashion for us than it would have done in a new, pioneering society or in the mind of someone equipped by a long formal education … I don't mean by this that we were necessarily less selfish. It was merely that the texture of our lives shaped the question into a class and not an individual form. We were surrounded by the established facts of the Industrial Revolution. We worked in pits, steel works, foundries, textiles, mills, factories. These were the obvious instruments of power and wealth … [and] we had a long tradition of class action behind us stretching back to the Chartists. So for us power meant the use of collective action designed to transform society and so lift all of us together … individual ambition was overlaid by the social imperative. The streams of individual initiative therefore flowed along collective channels already formed for us by our environment.' (Bevan, 1952:21-22)

This illustrates how 'human nature' is not fixed, but is moulded by the society we create. The neoliberal capitalist perspective both assumes and promotes an individualistic and selfish cast to human nature, driving an individualistic, consumption-oriented dynamic in tension with the enactment of democratic citizenship. Since the 1980s, public choice theory has exerted a great deal of influence over British and American democratic practice (for useful introductions see Dryzek, 1996:96-113; Dunleavy, 1991; Mueller, 1989). Normatively, public choice theorists advocate opening up political problems to the market, which is understood to aggregate individuals' fixed preferences (see Arrow, 1963) more efficiently than democratic systems, because it permits a more direct expression of preferences. It is argued that as voters people are ignorant of economic costs, but as consumers they 'know costs and pay prices' (Seldon, 1998:26).

As we have seen, different models of democracy are based on different ideas about human nature, but perhaps none quite so extreme as that within public choice theory, which is predicated on the idea of 'man' as 'an egoistic, rational utility-maximiser' (Mueller, 1989:2), in other words, rationally self-interested and skilled at assessing costs and benefits: usually understood in material terms,

with little reference to consequences or collective responsibility.[22] On this basis, theorists construct mathematical models to predict and critique political behaviour, which have heavily influenced public policy since the 1980s.

Public choice's presumption of fixed preferences generates a view of citizens as political consumers, 'shopping' for their desired electoral or social outcomes. Here, 'we' is no more than an aggregation of 'me's', and citizenship an abstraction, a set of duties and rights rather than an active mode of being. Citizenship and consumption are in tension: as a consumer, we are propelled towards individual action, as a citizen, towards collective action. Through the assumed superiority of economically 'rational' behaviour, we learn to reproduce this in political life. In markets, we express discontent by taking our business elsewhere, rather than by joining a collective attempt to make things better. The citizen is replaced by the consumer who can make choices but not give voice (see Clarke *et al*, 2007).[23] This is critical in understanding the democratic deficit: if we, the people, learn to 'take our business elsewhere', there is no polity left.[24]

Importantly, as with Bevan's socially constructed collective behaviour, valorising greed and the pursuit of material self-interest generates individualistic social behaviour. Thus, Dryzek (1996:93) documents how British society became much more aggressively individualistic as a result of Thatcher's policies, and Streeck (2012) traces the historical shift from states seeing people as citizens to seeing them as customers, and encouraging them to see themselves that way too. Bauman (1998:79-80) reflects that ours is a consumer society, not simply in the evident fact that we consume, but because 'the way present day society shapes its members is dictated first and foremost by the duty to play the role of the consumer; the norm our society holds up to its members is that of the ability and willingness to play it'. This matters because a society which increasingly

[22] David Orrell discusses the gendered nature of mainstream economics, which celebrates normatively masculine traits such as detachment, mathematical reasoning, formality, and abstraction, over supposedly feminine traits such as connectedness, verbal reasoning, informality, and concrete detail (Orrell, 2010:159).

[23] The public choice formulation is a strong example of liberal models of citizenship, which are similarly predicated on the idea of a fixed individual who possesses rights and duties. See Elster, 1997, for an overview of the different and competing behaviours encouraged by 'the market and the forum'.

[24] As the next chapter will explore, participatory democrats in the more egalitarian tradition are interested in the development of a different model of citizenship based in collective democratic processes, which rests on the idea of democratic learning. In this view, citizenship is based in relationships and a search for common values, a political community in which mutuality and cooperation in pursuit of collectively negotiated goals are possible.

embraces consumption over citizenship becomes a more hostile environment for egalitarian democracy.

At a more public level, the ideology can also be self-fulfilling in terms of its impact on policy discourse and the range of options available. Thus, we can identify a clear and depoliticising continuity of British economic policy from the 1980s onwards (Buller & Flinders, 2005; see also Burnham, 2014). The creation of ‘quasi-markets’ (the attempt to put economic values on other goods such as the environment) is a striking example of how this becomes not only a constraint on democracy but self-fulfilling in terms of publicly acceptable discourse. This is an attempt from within the paradigm to counter its negative effects, but ultimately it does so by shoring up its foundational myths, creating a vicious circle of negative learning. As Susan George (1997:52-3) puts it, ‘we used to laugh at the idea that market mechanisms could solve social problems: such things are now said every day with a straight face'. We have been conditioned to understand the business of democratic politics – the collective endeavour of humanity to govern ourselves and live well together – to be the 'politics of business', subject to market ‘laws’.

Crucially, this is not an inadvertent side-effect of the ideology. The role of thinktanks and other institutions in consciously promoting neoliberal ideas is well-documented (Stiglitz, 2002; George, 1997). In other words, there is an active campaign to ‘wage the war of ideas’; the subtitle of an Institute of Economic Affairs publication which encourages that endeavour:

> ‘Through research, advocacy and education, … thinktank leaders have successfully introduced classical liberal ideas into critical public debates, directly influencing public polity outcomes and legislation; the policy successes of these thinktanks include minimising barriers to business creation and market entry, creating stable financial structures, promoting free and open trade, reducing wasteful government spending and unnecessary taxes, and providing increased choice in education.’ (Dyble, 2008:29)

The author expresses her ‘hope that their stories will encourage you to wage the war of ideas in your own country … in response to the rising tide of socialism and expanding government intervention and control’ (Dyble, 2008:26).

Thus, Susan George concludes that:

> ‘Neoliberals understood … that to transform the economic, political and social landscape they first had to change the intellectual and psychological one; … imperceptibly, nearly everyone will come to feel that certain ideas are normal, natural, part of the air we breathe.’ (George, 1997:48).

In short, capitalism believes in competition but it doesn’t like competitors. The struggle for democracy may depend on articulating and activating visions which grow out of the narrative of equality, and which challenge the idea of democracy as compatible with possessive individualism.

Conclusion

Earlier in the chapter, I quoted from Matthew Flinders and Alexandra Kelso’s paper on the development of our parliamentary system at some length, not only because it clearly expressed the democratic limits of our parliamentary system, but because it is also a fascinating example of the limits of our democratic imagination. This detailed and accurate critique of the democratic pretensions of the UK system occurs in the context of a robust challenge to the near-consensus around the idea of a democratic deficit. In a trenchant critique of what they refer to as pervasive ‘lazy thinking’ around the democratic deficit, Flinders & Kelso argue that dissatisfaction can come from unrealistic expectations as well as from inadequate practice. The main thrust of their case is that the ‘parliamentary decline thesis’ is over-stated because scholars have ‘failed to acknowledge that parliamentary democracy was founded on the principle of ‘strong government’ and did not therefore include a proactive or assertive role for the legislature … and therefore [scholars have] contributed to the erosion of political support’ by raising false expectations (Flinders & Kelso, 2011:251). They appear to suggest that because the system has always been this way, it is misguided to raise an alarm.

Following the arguments presented in the previous chapter, I draw a very different conclusion from the same facts. A conscious awareness that people assume the system to be more democratic than it actually is, could be taken as a democratic opportunity. The UK has evident democratic limitations, but what

is significant is that these limitations exist for very definite reasons which are not widely discussed. At least part of what we understand to be the democratic deficit – that it has retained elite control and limited popular participation – is simply that it still fulfils the aims it was designed for.[25] If the cracks are becoming more visible (perhaps in part due to increasing pressures on national governments, perhaps in part due to better access to information by a more critical public), and we can understand – as Flinders & Kelso have so accurately described – that these cracks are not failings in the system but integral aspects of its design, then there is a chance that this might help free our democratic imaginations. The current situation is compounded because few people have direct experience of other forms or models of democracy. Hay's review of attitudinal survey data suggests not that most people don't want something better but that they currently can't conceive of anything better (Hay, 2007:33).

While the workings of global capitalism are significantly beyond the scope of this study, it is worth pausing here a moment. The assumptions I have explored in this chapter, which are presented as truths and laws, govern much of our lives. They affect how our governments behave, they affect how we see ourselves, they affect how we are invited to be democratically active as citizens, and they affect what is understood to be possible as a democratic system. Through a very brief glance at these assumptions, my aim (as with the understandings of democracy considered in the last chapter) has been to cultivate space for seeing differently, to remind ourselves that our taken-for-granted truths come with embedded values and agendas, *which we are free to reject*. Those of us who identify with the egalitarian tradition of democracy, rather than the more elitist tradition described in this chapter, can embrace and promote other kinds of rationality than economic rationality, other kinds of democracy than that associated with possessive individualism.

[25] Consider this extract from John Mueller's *defence* of liberal democracy, printed in the American Journal of Political Science in 1992: '*first, while it is true that the rich form a minority of the electorate, their money and status can be parlayed into substantial political influence. As suggested, the simple arithmetic of the ballot box is only a portion of the democratic effect – and perhaps not even a necessary one. Elsewhere, a sort of weighted voting takes place, and the rich enjoy influence far out of proportion to their numbers*' (1992:989). Astonishingly, the context of the extract demonstrates that this is intended as reassurance that the mob will not rule as tyrants, rather than critique (his next point is that the poor show a 'rough appreciation' that the rich are good for society).

John Dunn talks about democracy as our political identification, the term tenaciously retaining the meaning that 'we the people' rule ourselves. He argues that, today, this is a 'bare-faced lie' and that 'the history of modern politics has been a long, slow, resentful reconciliation to this obvious falsehood' (Dunn, 2005:51). This is centrally at the heart of the democratic deficit. What it means is that, in Western democracies such as the UK at least, the democratic promise does not equal either the experience or the anticipated results. What is going on here is quite simply an exaggerated conflation of 'the system we have' with 'democracy' as an ideal; as with demand-side theories of disengagement, it is certainly convenient for elite interests that this should happen.

The 18th century struggles I explored in the previous chapter demonstrate that democracy is an immensely powerful legitimising idea, which benefits those who can harness it. However, if, as I have suggested, we see each different model of democracy as an accommodation between different interests and agendas, then it is clear that different actors will have different aspirations. Those power-holders who are privileged by the status quo may want to solve the problem of legitimacy without undermining their power. Democratic activists may want to reform structures of power and expose the failings of the system. Others – disillusioned with democracy and living in a society which valorises and encourages identification as an individual and as a consumer – may make the 'rational' choice to live private lives rather than engage in active citizenship.

Thus, while the evidence suggests grounds for optimism in terms of so-called citizen 'apathy', the inherently limited nature of our democratic system poses two key questions in considering the democratic deficit. Firstly: to what extent are those who currently wield power within this system genuinely interested in exploring other ideas about democracy – specifically, ideas which pose a fundamental challenge to the location of power and sovereignty, and to our taken-for-granted 'truths' about democracy? An obvious response to this is to point out that democracy is taken, not given. However, this prompts the second, more difficult, question: given that the choice not to engage with a system originally intended to contain and limit your participation appears intelligible, arguably even rational, what would make enough of us want to stand up and take it – when our experience has taught too many of us that 'democracy' isn't inspiring, perhaps isn't even relevant to our day-to-day lives?

These questions illustrate that the solution too is about the location of power. Gerry Stoker (2010) proposes a 'design science' arm of political studies to improve the democratic process; understandably, he wants the experts to take responsibility for solutions not just critiques. Similarly, the state – also a set of political 'experts' – wants to shape how people participate. This might be described as an 'engineer's-eye view': the plausible desire to 'fix' the faults. A focus on the location of power and sovereignty, however, suggests that democracy actually requires a 'citizen-eye view', that the most promising route to democracy is likely to be through organising ourselves to make it better, not waiting to be asked, rejecting the idea that democracy is 'not our job'. If the problem is that power and sovereignty are held at a distance from the people, then perhaps we simply need to *be* democratic, to exert power and sovereignty.

Unfortunately, the solution that this analysis leads towards starts to sound a little like Catch-22: perhaps we'll demand better democracy when we are actually doing it. Accordingly, understanding our system of democracy as a value-laden historical construct, which we shape but which also shapes us, leads me as a democratic activist to believe that the key issue is not 'how do we bring more people into the system?', but 'how do we get to grips with the idea of nurturing more insistent demands for democracy?' It is apparent from the evidence presented in this chapter that an appetite for democracy does exist; this is demonstrated both from the relative health of more action-oriented citizen activities and from the levels of dissatisfaction. The question is, how do we translate dissatisfaction into a more vocal demand for better democracy?

In the next chapter, I look at one modern day example of 'doing democracy differently' in order to learn something about the appetite for democracy, and something about 'thinking democracy differently'. Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre recasts the relationship between citizens and the state, centrally addressing the location of power and sovereignty, and furthermore provides a living education in democratic culture. I also explore the story of how PB came about – the accommodation and struggles that it represents – as well as how it is defended, and by whom. In chapters 6 to 9, this story will come together with the democratic system in the UK, as I consider what happens to an egalitarian participatory democratic innovation such as PB in the context of our more individualised, centralised and hierarchical system.

CHAPTER 5

ANOTHER DEMOCRACY IS POSSIBLE: LESSONS FROM PORTO ALEGRE

In 2001, the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre hosted the first World Social Forum, a gathering of social movements and civil society groups 'opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism', who think and debate together, formulate proposals and boldly proclaim that 'another world is possible' (World Social Forum, 2002). Porto Alegre was a natural home for the Forum because, more than ten years earlier, the people of the city embarked on their own contribution to 'another world', a contribution which has put Porto Alegre firmly on the radar of activists and scholars interested in alternative forms of democracy. Participatory budgeting, as developed under the Workers' Party administration in Porto Alegre, is a distinctive and inspiring form of direct democracy: citizens hold actual decision-making power over public funds, rather than influence, as is the case in a representative system (for example, that of the UK).

In common with most of Latin America, Brazil differs immensely from the UK in its democratic history, having experienced both colonialism and a more recent period of military dictatorship. Significantly, it has thus been through a modern 'revolutionary moment', a new Constitution coming into force in 1988 after millions of Brazilians took to the streets to demand democratic elections and an end to twenty years of military dictatorship. The 1988 constitution explicitly acknowledged that sovereignty could be exercised by 'people's initiative' as well as by means of a vote, and indeed required popular participation in the formulation of some policies.[1]

The overthrow of the dictatorship meant that democracy itself was again publicly negotiable, not only in the formal sense that the Constitution redefined political structures, but in a broader societal sense via the existence of a mass popular movement which was actively theorising democracy through its values, actions and demands. The collective effort to replace dictatorship with

[1] Article 14 of the 1988 Brazilian Constitution states that 'the sovereignty of the people shall be exercised by universal suffrage and by the direct and secret voting, with equal value for all, and, according to the law, by means of: 1) plebiscite, 2) referendum, 3) people's initiative. Article 27 states that 'the law shall provide for people's initiative in the legislative proceedings of the states', while articles 198 and 204 specifically require popular participation with regard to health and social security (Brazil Government, 1988).

democracy created space to reflect on and debate good democratic process (in precisely the way that reifying the UK's 'mother of parliaments' does not). This process involved both an active pro-democracy movement and significant anti-democratic forces (with attendant undemocratic legacies, most notably a tenacious tradition of clientelist political practices). As with the US constitutional arguments of the eighteenth century, participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre is a clear demonstration of democratic debates in action.

In terms of understanding who is democratically engaged in the UK and why, the story of participatory budgeting (PB) in Porto Alegre generates useful insights for at least three reasons. Firstly, it is a modern (and rare) instance of the egalitarian democratic tradition, and as such, is a valuable reference point when considering the issues raised in the last chapter. As we will see, the core principles and practices of Porto Alegrean PB rest on very different assumptions and values to those underpinning UK democracy. Secondly, as an empirical example of egalitarian democracy, it illustrates what outcomes may be possible within this orientation, both in terms of substantive changes (things being done differently as a result of participation via PB) and democratic outcomes such as engagement levels and a growth in citizenship. This again offers a pertinent reflection on the more individualistic, representative tradition of the UK. Finally, the Porto Alegre experience has inspired increasing numbers of localities to develop and deepen their own democratic processes, sparking many similar participatory innovations worldwide, including the Newcastle and Bradford experiences documented here. Since its inception in Porto Alegre, PB has spread to an estimated 1,200-2,800 localities worldwide (Sintomer *et al*, 2013a).[2] This in itself prompts an enquiry into what it is about this particular development that generates such enthusiasm.

It is also noteworthy that PB has attracted interest from organisations as intriguingly diverse as the Occupy Movement and the World Bank (Hetland & Martin, 2012; Shah, 2007), and has taken a variety of forms, from participatory grant-making processes of a few thousand pounds to annual processes distributing many millions, from consultative events to genuine power-sharing, and from small neighbourhoods to city-wide schemes (Sintomer *et al*, 2013a; Cabannes, 2004). As with any democratic innovation, each system represents

[2] The figure depends on the criteria used (see Sintomer *et al*, 2012:2-3).

an accommodation between the democratic aims and values of the actors involved, and the values and assumptions which are embedded in the local social and political context. The diversity amongst its supporters therefore underlines the need to examine the agendas and values in each local expression of PB (an issue I will revisit in the following chapters).

Finally, PB in Porto Alegre contributes analysis as well as evidence to the story of democratic engagement. The broader context of growing (and growing awareness of) disenchantment with established representative democracies is reflected not only in the democratic deficit literature discussed in chapter 4, but in contemporary attempts to theorise alternative models of democracy: the activist-theorists of Porto Alegre provide a distinctive voice within this literature.

The wide variety of practices gathered under the name of 'participatory budgeting' do not all have the same underpinning values and assumptions, and thus reflect an equally broad spectrum of democratic understandings. However, the aim of this chapter is to explore the normative framework for one concrete expression of egalitarian democracy, and to understand how this connects with democratic motivation, not to review or evaluate the global phenomenon that PB has become. For this purpose, Porto Alegre is an obvious choice.[3] Not only was it the original and longest-running example, but there is a clear convergence in the literature that it represents one end of the scale in terms of deepening democracy (Marquetti *et al*, 2012; Goldfrank, 2007; Baiocchi, 2001; Wampler, 2000). Furthermore, while there may be many different motivations for initiating participatory budgeting-style processes, the Porto Alegrean example is consciously presented by its protagonists (and many scholars) as part of a radical and alternative tradition defending democracy against the hegemonic global forces explored in the previous two chapters (CIDADE, 2010; Goldfrank, 2006; Bruce, 2004; Pont, 2004; Baierle, 2003; Santos, 1998).

This chapter will explore the development of PB in Porto Alegre and the underlying values which shaped it, relate this approach to the egalitarian democratic narrative, and ask what we in the UK can learn about the location of sovereignty and democratic engagement from the Porto Alegre experience.

[3] In the following chapter, I will look at the comparative literature which seeks to understand what factors account for the wide variations in outcomes across the many different processes called 'participatory budgeting'.

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING IN PORTO ALEGRE: AN OVERVIEW

Porto Alegre (which translates as 'joyful harbour') is the state capital of Rio Grande do Sul, in the South of Brazil. It is a relatively wealthy city by Brazilian standards, but there is also great inequality. In 1988, the year Olívio Dutra was elected as the city's first *Partido dos Trabhaladores* (the PT, the Workers' Party) mayor, around a quarter of Porto Alegre's approximately 1.3 million inhabitants lived in the 'informal city', with only limited access to basic services (Baiocchi, 2005:6-7). The PT places inequality centre-stage, an 'inversion of priorities' for public spending being one of their two central concerns. The promotion of popular participation is the other. Launched in 1980, the PT has its roots in the *Central Única dos Trabalhadores* (a national Trade Union federation) and has always been closely allied with radical social movements. It represents a new autonomous Left which broke with the vanguardist 'old Left'; accordingly, it is fundamentally participatory in its own organisational structure (Abers, 1996; Nylen, 2003:37-49).

Dutra's administration therefore came to power in Porto Alegre with an ideological commitment to the bottom-up democratic exercise of power, and to enacting fundamentally redistributive social policies. The first Porto Alegrean participatory budgeting experience took place the following year, in 1989. The vital role of the PT in establishing PB as a democratic process is explored in detail by some of PB's earliest commentators (most notably Rebecca Abers, 1996, 1998 & 2000). However, Sergio Baierle, widely recognised as one of Porto Alegre's most insightful PB observers as well a deeply committed democratic activist whose NGO, CIDADE,[4] has supported citizen access to the participatory budget since its inception, rejects the view sometimes expressed by state officials that 'civil society was a desert by the end of the eighties … [from which] they have built an oasis of participation and investment in social needs' (Baierle, 2002:1). This view is reinforced by scholars who have explored the role of civil society organisations in the development of PB (Avritzer, 2006; Baiocchi, 2005; Wampler & Avritzer, 2004), and there is increasingly a convergence around the idea that both high levels of political support and an active civil society (willing to cooperate but also prepared to contest the state

[4] *Centro de Assessoria e Estudos Urbanos* (Advisory and Urban Studies Centre); CIDADE itself translates as 'city'.

where necessary) were central factors in creating the conditions for Porto Alegre's successful PB system (Sintomer *et al*, 2008; Wampler, 2007; Goldfrank, 2007). Baierle (2002) articulates the role of popular education in the growth of politicised neighbourhood associations during the 70s and 80s (part of the movement against the dictatorship), which fostered an emergent culture of participation and open debate, as well as providing opportunities for learning community organising, empowered decision-making and how to exert pressure on government. This culture was already present to a significant degree in at least 5 of the 16 PB regions by 1989.[5]

Both the PT and civil society organisations contributed specific design principles to the original PB structure. The umbrella organisation *União das Associações de Moradores de Porto Alegre* (UAMPA, the Union of Neighbourhood Associations of Porto Alegre) demanded the right to participate in deliberation on budget issues at the local level in 1986, and in 1989 negotiated with the PT that PB assemblies should be held at local rather than municipal level; for their part, the PT insisted on individual participation where UAMPA had envisaged participation via neighbourhood associations (Avritzer, 2006:625-6).

The development of PB was facilitated by the 1988 Constitution's position on the legitimate sovereignty of popular initiatives, and Porto Alegre stands out from the whole of the rest of Brazil in the degree to which it took advantage of this legal infrastructure (Avritzer, 2006:623). Fiscal and political decentralisation were also very important enabling factors, in particular the degree to which, under the Brazilian system, fiscal responsibility is concentrated in the hands of the mayor rather than the local legislature. Finally, the relative prosperity of Porto Alegre mattered; local resources existed which could be distributed via a participatory democratic process.

Nonetheless, the early stages of the road to a successful PB system in Porto Alegre encompassed significant challenges. While the city was not itself poor by Brazilian standards, the PT in 1988 encountered both a bankrupt municipality and a disorganised bureaucracy (Wampler, 2000:3). Furthermore, clientelist practices, though challenged by empowered civil society organisations, defined the overall political context (Baiocchi *et al*, 2011:40-41). Abers outlines the

[5] There is considerable discussion within the literature about the impact of PB in less mobilised areas, which I will touch on briefly later in the chapter.

many immediate difficulties which the PT faced, including a lack of information, crises such as a bus company strike in response to the attempt to raise wages (i.e. a temporary withdrawal of service by contracted companies, not a strike by workers), opposition from the (non-PT) legislature, and accusations of 'selling out' as the mayor, who declared he could not solve the problems of capitalism, struggled to meet the expectations of the people (Abers, 2000:67-71). In this context, the first attempt at what would become known as participatory budgeting resulted in what many described as a colossal wish list; the administration's subsequent inability to deliver on these demands led to a drop in participation the following year (*op. cit*.:71-75).

The response to these crises was, however, informed by a genuine commitment to participatory democracy and to generating public outcomes which were transformational for the poor (a commitment both from within the state and empowered sections of civil society). In conjunction with deepening the participatory mechanisms of the budgeting cycle, and administrative restructuring to bring government closer to citizens, substantial tax reforms were undertaken in order to generate adequate state revenue. In order to do this, the PT (which did not have a majority in the legislature) relied on a major popular mobilisation to pressure legislators to approve the tax reform law (Santos, 1998:477).[6] By way of these processes, PB emerged as part of a broader political movement to create meaningful and publicly agreed forms of democracy in accordance with popular social movement values.

PB in Porto Alegre continued to evolve over the years, not least because citizens themselves had a central role in agreeing the rules of the process. In brief, the participatory budget deals with the investment budget, which is 10% of the city budget (though 100% of the overall budget is deemed to be involved, because this is subject to approval by the participatory budgeting council before it goes to the municipal council; Cabannes, 2004:34). PB in Porto Alegre involves a known annual cycle of public meetings and events; thus people understand when and how to participate, which amounts to a year-round mobilisation of budget participants. There are 16 regional and 5 thematic assemblies (transport; education, leisure and culture; health and social welfare;

[6] Santos (*ibid*.) notes in passing that the rightist and centrist legislators were quite surprised to find the people pressuring them to *raise* taxes!

economic development and taxation; and city organisation and development), which all meet twice each year. However, the budget cycle begins with preparatory meetings, organised by budget councillors, delegates and neighbourhood associations who mobilise citizens to attend the assemblies. In the first round of assembly meetings, the administration presents an account of the Investment Plan from the previous year for evaluation by communities, and outlines the arrangements for that year's budget process. At this assembly, budget delegates are elected in proportion to attendance at the meeting (in other words, the larger the turnout from each neighbourhood, the more delegates it can elect).[7] At intermediate meetings before the second round of state-run assemblies, each region agrees their broad priorities (ranking needs such as sewage, housing, street paving, education, social assistance, health, and transport). At these meetings, which are organised by civil society organisations (though with input from budget representatives and officials as needed), citizens also formulate and prioritise specific projects (referred to as demands). At the second round of assemblies, each region presents these priorities and demands, the administration gives an account of expenses and expected income, and budget councillors are elected (2 plus 2 substitutes per region). The thematic forums were introduced in 1993/94 to take account of city-wide issues, and follow a similar process (including the election of citizen delegates and councillors).

Delegates and councillors form regional budget forums, and the *Conselho do Orçamento Participativo* (the participatory budget council, known as the COP). The COP meets weekly, without remuneration or even travel expenses, to discuss resource allocation and prepare the Investment Plan, which allocates specific projects to the available funds. Funds are distributed according to a carefully worked out formula (itself agreed by the COP) balancing population and levels of deprivation. Priorities and specific projects are included in the Investment Plan according to the priorities agreed through the assemblies and taking technical criteria into account, a process which involves much negotiation and discussion. Council officers are present at COP meetings, and are able to contribute both suggestions and technical expertise. The COP also plays an essential role in agreeing the rules for the subsequent year's budget cycle; PB

[7] From a 'citizen-eye' perspective, the participation of each individual matters.

in Porto Alegre is a participant-regulated process. Delegates meet on a monthly basis, and act as intermediaries between citizens and the COP. They additionally undertake 'priority trips' to all the projects in their own region, to collectively evaluate the social need of each project.

The Investment Plan is finally presented to the legislature for approval, though the participatory nature of the process by which it has been developed makes this something of a formality (it is difficult for legislators to reject the people's budget). Deliberation is an important dimension of the process, the primary deliberative forums being the regional assemblies, the COP and delegates' meetings, and the process of agreeing the rules for PB.

This overview briefly describes the main features of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre between the years of 1989 and 2004.[8] In that year, the PT lost the mayoral election to José Fogaça of the *Partido Popular Socialista* (the Socialist People's Party, a party of the 'old Left' with a more limited and instrumental commitment to participatory democracy). Baiocchi & Ganuza have noted that 'a politically conservative coalition maintained the surface features of Participatory Budgeting while returning the actual functioning of the administration to more traditional modes of favour-trading and the favouring of local elites' (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2014:34). Baierle describes PB after 2004 as a 'parody', citing a lack of transparency about rules and decisions, and describing how the link between participation and action has been weakened (if not broken), as neighbourhoods which didn't prioritise certain themes receive more of those resources than those that did, and the administration cherry-picks initiatives for implementation (Baierle, 2008). The response of PB's protagonists is encapsulated in a letter 'from Metropolitan Porto Alegre' composed at a World Social Forum workshop convened by the NGO CIDADE, entitled 'Participatory budgeting: popular power or participatory exclusion?' The letter sets out the fundamental principles of PB, and argues that anything else cannot be called PB (CIDADE, 2010).

Overall, the structures in place after 2004 are not considered 'PB' by its constituencies and supporters within Porto Alegre, and are not rooted in the same democratic understandings and values. Because the aim of this chapter is to explore the egalitarian-democratic narrative in practice, this chapter refers

[8] For more detail, see Marquetti *et al*, 2012:66-69; Wampler, 2000; or Santos, 1998:469-474.

predominantly to the practice and outcomes of PB in Porto Alegre between 1989 and 2004 (in keeping with common practice in the literature). However, while the specific reasons for the PT's defeat lie somewhat outside the scope of this work,[9] it is important to note that the terrain of contesting and defending democracy remains very much alive in Porto Alegre. The fate of PB in Porto Alegre after 2004 is an enormously significant moment in terms of the power dynamics between this narrative and the possessive-individualist democratic tradition. The silence of the PB literature on this subject is remarkable,[10] and arguably indicates a need to better understand not only the disparity in values between different democratic expressions, but the significance of the power struggle between them.

SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS (AND SOME LIMITATIONS)

There is broad agreement that, between 1989 and 2004, PB in Porto Alegre generated an impressive range of positive outcomes, in terms of political participation, social justice and good governance. In the light of my primary focus on democratic engagement, I will turn to political participation first.

Participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre has unquestionably generated a hugely significant increase in active citizen participation. The municipal administration recorded attendance of 979 in 1990, 3,694 in 1991, 10,735 in 1993, and 28,549 in 1999 (Wampler & Avritzer, 2004:301-2), though it is possible that these figures could be multiplied several times if attendance at the intermediate meetings had also been counted (Santos, 1998:486). Attendance in the final 2003/2004 budget cycle has been reported at around 50,000 participants (Wampler 2007:107). It is worth noting that the participation referred to is not trivial, either in time commitment or capacity, comprising as it does a spectrum of activity from neighbourhood mobilisation to (unpaid) weekly attendance at budget council meetings.

There is widespread agreement that participatory budgeting led to an increase in the participation of women, ethnic minorities, and people with low incomes and/or low levels of education (Wampler, 2007:30-31; Baiocchi, 2005:14-15;

[9] Daniel Chavez (2006) highlights a campaign which played on the desire for change after 16 years of continuous PT government, growing administrative problems and disenchantment with the national PT government.

[10] Baierle stands out as a rare voice exploring the topic (see Baierle, 2003, 2008).

Baierle, 2002:7-8; Abers, 2000:121-132). In addition, each year saw a substantial number of 'first timers' without prior participation in civil society (Baiocchi, 2005:14). Although attention in the literature is commonly focused on the previously excluded, it is worth noting that middle-class participation also increased, because the administration was seen to be effective rather than corrupt, and because valued services such as public space and cultural activities were improved via PB (Santos, 1998:506).

While the proportion of women and those with lower levels of education decreases amongst elected budget representatives, it is important to consider this against the pre-existing situation, rather than an as yet unrealised ideal. Thus, Baierle (2007:39-40) emphasises not just the discrete participation figures but the direction of travel compared to the previous arrangements. For example, the proportion of women in Porto Alegre's city council had never been more than 10%, compared with 30% in COP (Baiocchi, 2001:64). Similarly, while participation remained highest in the areas with the strongest traditions of participation or community organisation (Avritzer, 2006:630), it increased most rapidly in areas with previously weak traditions of community organisation (Wampler & Avritzer, 2004:203; Abers, 2000:129-132; Baiocchi 2005:51-56).

Related to the question of prior organisation, there is some discussion in the literature regarding the number of PB participants who are also members of civil society organisations, a much higher proportion than within the population as a whole (Wampler, 2007:76). However, the evidence suggests that people engage with such organisations (or create new ones where there is a lack) through the PB process itself (see Baiocchi, 2001 & 2005; Baierle, 2003:311). The concern that PB fails to reach beyond what we in the UK might call the 'usual suspects' thus appears unfounded; rather the PB process makes a contribution to building civil society, particularly in areas with lower levels of prior organisation. Furthermore, following the analysis presented in the previous chapter, connecting citizens who are active elsewhere with formal political processes may itself be considered an outcome.

In addition to the overall rise in participation, PB is widely understood to have generated an improvement in the quality of engagement, via the broad development of democratic skills. PB acts as a 'school for citizenship': the ability

of citizens to participate increases through the process itself (Pontual, 2014; Baierle, 2002; Wampler, 2000; Abers, 1998). This is an immensely significant outcome in terms of democratic engagement, which I will explore in more detail later in the chapter.

These outcomes reflect gains in the field of political equality, but they are also linked to substantive equality. The motivation for this increased participation is understood to relate to resource distribution and the effectiveness of participation in PB decision-making in creating change for their communities; consequently it was not uncommon for regions to see a reduction in participation once their initial demands are met, only to come back when they realise that investment in their region declined accordingly (Santos, 1998:494).

The issue of substantive equality brings us to the PT's other primary aim, the 'inversion of priorities' in favour of poorer citizens. Here, the evidence is equally conclusive; Porto Alegrean PB generated real changes in terms of the lived realities of the city's poorer communities. In ten years, water supplies, sewage services, waste collection, public transport and primary level education reached almost 100% of the population, and there have been radical improvements in street paving and the provision of crèches and healthcare (Marquetti *et al*, 2012:72-74; Baierle, 2002:4; Abers, 2000:109-110; Santos, 1998:485). Thus, Marquetti *et al* (2012:74-77), having undertaken a thorough review, conclude that PB between 1989 and 2004 had a clear redistributive effect toward the economically disadvantaged, noting also that the public works undertaken not only improved the quality of life for poorer citizens, but raised the value of their assets, which are even more unequally distributed than income.

In addition, there is evidence of greater equality with regard to less tangible factors. I have already discussed political inclusion in relation to PB; there are also indications of improved social inclusion. Abers describes poorer regions gaining 'the right to the city' through PB. As these areas secured basic services that other districts took for granted, they became 'part of the city'; citizens from other areas began for the first time to visit, either to use services or simply because the neighbourhoods became more easily accessible (Abers, 2000:110). Similarly, the public discourse associated with PB is understood to have promoted a 'trans-classist' pride in the city (Santos, 1998:506).

The third and final broad area of outcomes associated with Porto Alegrean PB is the effect of increased transparency and accountability, which may be summed up as good governance.[11] This includes a decrease in tax delinquency and a corresponding increase in tax revenue (Cabannes, 2004:36; Santos, 1998:485), improved planning as a result of having to explain decisions in advance (Abers, 1996:46); a very significant reduction in clientelist practices (Avritzer, 2006:305; Abers, 1998, 2000), and a more general shift away from a confrontational political culture to one of constructive conflict and negotiation (Santos, 1998:482).

While the literature is clear that Porto Alegre's PB represents an immensely significant democratic advance with exceptionally positive effects, I will conclude this section with a brief review of its perceived limitations.[12] Some are process-related, for example councillors frequently voiced a concern that discussions were rushed, and there is evidence that the executive was able to exert undue influence in the COP as a result of experience and technical expertise (Santos, 1998:473-4 & 498). Additionally, the amount of resources covered by PB is determined outside the participatory space (Marquetti *et al*, 2012:78), in other words there is an issue of the scope of sovereignty. However, the issues of limited participation and citizen power predate PB: it is important to note that, as with the profile of participants, PB still represents an advance in these areas. Furthermore, there is evidence that participants respond to such limitations as they become aware of them, for example, changing the chairing arrangements in the COP in order to address power imbalances (Santos, 1998:474), and mobilising to extend the sphere of decision-making under PB (*op. cit*.:1998:480-481).

Other issues are more closely related to the nature of the process itself. For example, there are concerns that PB can focus attention on local rather than city-wide issues, and short-term rather than long-term planning (Marquetti *et al*, 2012:79; Baierle, 2003). In these cases too, there have been attempts to address the issues through the (participant-regulated) PB system (albeit with

[11] Arguably, this is the root of the World Bank's interest in the experience. See Shah, 2007; and Goldfrank, 2012, for further discussion.

[12] In relation to the limitations of PB beyond Porto Alegre, there is considerable debate in the literature around what constitutes necessary conditions for successful PB. As this generally doesn't involve a critique of the process in Porto Alegre itself, I am not addressing it here, but return to the issue in the following chapter.

varying degrees of success). These have included the introduction of thematic assemblies to address city-wide needs (Santos, 1998:479), and a Citizen's Assembly to focus on longer term planning (Wampler, 2000:24).

A more deep-rooted issue concerns the capacity of PB to address systemic problems (i.e. relating to capitalist economics). Marquetti *et al* (2012:79) note that PB is concerned only with the government budget in economies that are predominantly private, and Wampler (2007:65) articulates the 'unintended consequence' that activists are focused on the 'local not global'. A more hard-Left form of the argument suggests that PB helps elites cope with the "crisis of capitalism" by diverting popular movements into collaboration with the state, and away from direct action to transform it (Goldfrank, 2006:10). The issue here is that PB does not clearly provide participants with the opportunity to challenge the underlying reasons for their social and economic exclusion (these are held outside the democratic space by virtue of the capitalist separation of politics and economics, rather than through PB design). While this is a real concern for democrats, again PB is not worse than pre-existing systems in this sense. However, the crucial question, of how the undemocratic tendencies of capitalism can be effectively challenged, remains.

A constructive engagement with the sentiments behind this critique is implied within the 'Letter from Metropolitan Porto Alegre' (defending the original conception of PB). The authors' ask:

> 'How does one build the political will for such a project as radical as the socialization of the means of government decision-making, except by strengthening and democratizing the sources of popular power? These certainly cannot be found in state instruments, but in the construction of individual and collective subjects by ordinary women and men, of all ethnicities, colours and life conditions, within and outside local and global institutions, committed to reinvent not only political power but also society.*'* (CIDADE, 2010)

In the remainder of this chapter, I explore the potential that the experience of a more egalitarian form of democracy has for building a counter-narrative to the 'truths' perpetuated by the possessive-individualist model of democracy associated with hegemonic capitalism, and for strengthening popular power.

A DEMOCRATIC LEARNING JOURNEY

Faith in the public capacity for civic learning is a fundamental tenet of the egalitarian democratic narrative (as articulated most notably by Carol Pateman in her classic work *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 1970). Indeed, Fung & Wright (2003:28) note that the people affected by decisions have an incentive to learn to make good decisions 'because they must live with the consequences of poor ones.' In keeping with this, the Porto Alegrean approach to PB foregrounds the development of citizenship as an active, *learned* mode of being, which presents a clear contrast to the model of citizenship associated with the possessive-individualist narrative discussed in the previous chapter. It is significant that a prominent educational component was incorporated within the process design (Abers, 1996:43-44), specifically for this purpose. The evidence from Porto Alegre strongly demonstrates that such learning is possible, and allows us to explore in more detail precisely what it is that citizens learn through participatory democratic engagement.

As I noted above, there is a broad consensus within the literature that PB does act as an effective 'school for citizenship'. Through participation, citizens have developed skills including negotiation, prioritisation, cooperation, how to conduct (and participate in) a meeting so that all voices are heard, and mobilising resources for collective goals (Pontual, 2014:428; Abers, 1998:526-529); Baiocchi, 2005:43). There have also been widespread gains in specific areas of knowledge, including knowledge of how the political system works (both legislative and administrative), public finance and budgeting, and technical information relating to public works (Pontual, 2014:428; Baiocchi, 2005:43; Wampler, 2000:16, 25 & 28).

Importantly, there is also clear evidence that citizens increase their democratic understanding through participation, and that this translates into a developed practice of citizenship. Thus, participants use their improved understanding to defend or deepen the territory for exercising citizenship. In addition to the examples mentioned above (challenging the dominance of the COP by the executive and mobilising to extend the decisions subject to the participatory budget), participants held their representatives accountable, demanding '*retorno*' (the diffusion of information via reporting back) from councillors and delegates, as well as other institutions within the budgeting system (Santos,

1998:487-8), and increasingly used challenge and confrontation intelligently to return issues to the participatory arena. For example, when delegates disagreed with a decision to reject the demand for a streetlight (in an area with a high level of accidents involving children) on the technical grounds that there were sufficient lights nearby, they used direct action, stopping traffic to draw attention to the issue. While there was no immediate solution, discussion between delegates and the state resumed (Baiocchi, 2005:78-80).

Similarly, as the post-2004 administration sought to decrease the importance of PB as an empowered decision-making arena, delegates used the skills, knowledge and language gained during sixteen years of PB to directly confront the government (Wampler, 2007:260). This is how Wampler describes the delegates whom he observed:

> 'They were no longer simply citizens trying to get the government to listen to them; they were rights-bearing members of the polity seeking to force the government to comply with their previous commitments and the institutionalised rule structures that governed the distribution of public works projects.' (*ibid*.)

In defending these rule structures, delegates are safeguarding not simply their access to resources but democratic norms, which they have learned to value and to fight for through the participatory experience itself.

Increased understanding and experience has encouraged more collective civic behaviour. PB is a forum for prioritising competing demands, and therefore predominantly a vehicle for dialogue *between* citizens, rather than between citizens and the state. There is ample evidence to suggest that citizens will enter into long-term negotiations with their fellow citizens, often sacrificing short-term gains for future gains (Wampler, 2007:277), and expanding their focus to a wider community or city-wide perspective (Baiocchi, 2005:56-59; Wampler, 2000:16, Abers, 1998:527-528). This was observed to happen in a number of ways: through the deliberative process itself, as many demands must be postponed in order to attend to the most critical (Baierle, 2002:4, calls this a 'negotiated solidarity', recognising that 'this learning is not easy'); via the 'priority trip' by delegates, which highlights the similarity of demands by different neighbourhoods (delegates have been known to change their position after

visiting a site where the social need appears greater; Wampler, 2000:26); and finally, because even 'losing' issues are publicly aired, the strength of concern is communicated to fellow citizens (Wampler, 2007:8-11). This can be considered a growth in solidarity, an important element in a relational model of citizenship.

The experience of participatory democracy generated an increase in active citizenship outside the process itself, including (in addition to the mobilisation for tax reform already mentioned) the demand for land regularisation (after citizens learned how this issue prevented state provision of basic services in many cases; Baierle, 2003:312-313); budget councillors learning to follow wider debates in the legislature and mobilising fellow citizens to attend debates or organise rallies (Santos, 1998:473), and the development of PB fora as a broader civic public sphere (for example a mother using a PB meeting to organise a response to a school shooting) (Baiocchi, 2005:99).

Arguably, this expansion represents an extension of 'democratic appetite', though I am not implying that the desire for change did not already exist, rather that the learned experience of participatory democracy encourages participants to take action. The huge increases in participation in the early years of PB is attributed to the fact that time spent doing PB *demonstrably* delivered public goods (Avritzer, 2006:629-630; Abers, 2003:205; Wampler, 2000:25).[13]

While the literature tends to focus predominantly on participants, it is worth recording that PB proved a learning journey for those within government bodies as well. In this sense, PB is a democratic intervention which does not only improve access to the state, but improves the democratic qualities *of* the state (as befits a 'supply-side' response to the democratic deficit). To illustrate, state officials used to exercising power by virtue of their technical knowledge have been through a profound learning process concerning dialogue with lay citizens, finding ways to communicate technical issues simply, and persuade rather than impose (Santos, 1998:500). This has also been consciously supported through PB; in 1997 the mayor launched the 'Program of Internalisation of the Participatory Budgeting' aimed at state officials (*ibid*.). Like participants, government representatives learn listening, dialogue and respect for citizens

[13] This motivation is recognised by Fung & Wright in their 'empowered participatory governance' model. They argue that the opportunity to change outcomes via the exercise of observable power (with visible results) motivates participation (Fung & Wright, 2003:27).

through shared deliberative processes (Pontual, 2014:428). This is a two-way process – there is evidence of improved trust in public officials and government as a result of the closer proximity (Wampler, 2007; Baiocchi, 2005:45).

By highlighting what can be learned through 'doing democracy', PB illustrates the kind of citizenship inherent in participatory democracy. The evidence from Porto Alegre builds a picture of an informed, value-driven, relational process, which is premised on the potential for cooperation and solidarity in the pursuit of collectively negotiated goals. This citizenship is not a right to be possessed, but an action which is brought into existence by virtue of being practiced. As Barber (1984:155) puts it: 'at the moment when "masses" start deliberating, acting, sharing and contributing, they cease to be masses and become citizens'. By implication, and as the evidence above suggests, citizenship is a quality that each of us can develop through practice. This view of citizenship is intimately related to the egalitarian democratic view of human nature as not fixed but possessing the potential for mutuality and cooperation (and thus to a view of democracy as an inherently collective rather than aggregative process).

Pateman (1970:29) explicitly links this potential for growth within the human character to the nature of political institutions, arguing that the basic assertion of participatory democratic theory concerns 'the interrelationship and connection between individuals, their qualities and psychological characteristics, and types of institutions; [therefore] responsible social and political action depends largely on the sort of institutions within which the individual has, politically, to act'. Importantly, democratic practice in this view is iterative. As the Luddites found two hundred years ago, the development of democratic literacy is both radical and radicalising.

THE 'ORDER OF EQUALITY' ENACTED?

Thus far, I have focused on the practice and outcomes of PB, in order to understand what different outcomes may be possible in the context of a radically different manifestation of democracy. I have previously suggested that the democratic outcomes we can expect are intimately connected to the principles and values inherent in each particular model of democracy. With regard to Porto Alegrean PB, these principles and values are explicitly spelled out by most protagonists and scholars. CIDADE offers the following definition:

> ‘A bottom-up social contract, combines structure and process … based on direct participation and social justice standards, aiming at the drafting and co-management of the public budget.’ [14]

While this is a good starting point, the literature contains a wide variety of different lists of PB’s essential principles (democracy being the contested concept that it is). Drawing on key scholars as well as local actors such as Raul Pont, mayor of Porto Alegre from 1997 to 2000, Sergio Baierle, and the ‘Letter from Metropolitan Porto Alegre’ (which sought to defend the original conception of PB), the following list gives an overview of the most referenced principles (ordered by theme not importance):

- The direct participation of individuals;[15]
- A participant-regulated cycle of known events;[16]
- The power to make real decisions (i.e. ‘binding’ not consultative);[17]
- Combination of representative and participatory traditions;[18]
- Significant opportunities for deliberation;[19]
- Social justice intention.[20]

Taken together, the first four principles emphasise the nature of the relationship between the citizen and the state, a relationship in which the citizen is empowered to be an active participant. Accordingly, the practices they generate are useful in exploring the nature of sovereignty integral to PB. Foregrounding deliberation reflects the understanding that democracy is a collective process. CIDADE’s definition is a useful additional reference, as it highlights how social justice and participation are given equal emphasis. In the following sections, I situate these principles with reference to the egalitarian narrative (reviewing

[14] See: http://www.ongcidade.org/site/php/op/opEN.php?acao=conceitos_op. Accessed 24/08/2014.
[15] Baiocchi *et al*, 2011:54; CIDADE, 2010; Sintomer *et al*, 2008:167; Baierle, 2007:81; Avritzer, 2006:623; Goldfrank, 2006:4, Pont, 2004:117; de Souza, 2004; Santos, 1998:46; Abers, 1996:37.
[16] Wampler 2012; Baiocchi *et al*, 2011:54; CIDADE, 2010; Sintomer *et al*, 2008:167; Goldfrank, 2006:4; Avritzer, 2006:624; Pont, 2004:117; de Souza, 2004; Santos, 1998:468; Abers, 1996:37.
[17] Wampler 2012; Baiocchi *et al*, 2011:54, Goldfrank, 2007:163; Baierle, 2007:81; de Souza, 2004.
[18] Baiocchi *et al*, 2011:159; CIDADE 2010; Avritzer, 2006:624; Goldfrank, 2006:4; Santos, 1998:468.
[19] Wampler 2012; Baiocchi *et al*, 2011:89; Sintomer *et al*, 2008:168; Baierle, 2007:81; Goldfrank, 2006:4; Pont, 2004:117; Wampler & Avritzer, 2004:300.
[20] Wampler, 2012; Baierle, 2007:81; Sintomer *et al*, 2008:167; Goldfrank, 2006:4; Avritzer, 2006:624; Abers, 2000:50.

what we learn from Porto Alegrean PB about conceptions of human nature, the state, equality and freedom), and explore the location of sovereignty which underpins the outcomes described above.

PB AND THE PARTICIPATORY CITIZEN

By insisting on the direct participation of individuals and giving citizens responsibility for regulating the democratic process, PB demonstrates a conception of human nature which contrasts with the individualistic and static liberal model associated with representative democracy. As the construction of PB as a 'school for citizenship' makes clear, people are understood to have the potential to be effective democratic agents. PB expects a great deal of citizens, expectations which, as the previous section demonstrates, have been fulfilled. Opportunities for learning were intentionally built into the process, in conscious rejection of the common policy-world objection to participatory democracy that poor communities don't have the capacity to engage in decision-making (Baiocchi *et al*, 2011:157). These 'opportunities' can take the form of direct information-sharing, as mentioned earlier, or design features that consciously enable participants to develop skills, such as those articulated in Fung & Wright's 'empowered participatory governance' model, which engages citizens deliberatively with specific, tangible problems, via devolved but supported decision-making units (Fung & Wright, 2003:15-16).

In contrast to the rationale behind representative democracy, participatory democracy is designed to encourage not contain democratic expression. The underlying assumption is that citizens are the best source of expertise on the issues that affect them. Indeed, Baiocchi *et al* (*ibid*.) suggest that claims to the contrary are little more than polite ways of legitimising the transfer of decision-making from citizens to elites. Thus, former Porto Alegrean mayor Raul Pont argues that 'through opening up spaces for participatory democracy, and inviting the people themselves to take the lead … change can be achieved more quickly and more deeply' (Pont, 2004:131).

What shines through here is the political importance of 'becoming'. Democracy is not an opinion poll, because people can change their ideas as they work, learn and debate together. This is a central theme in participatory political theory, in which democracy is understood as 'a project concerned with the

political potentialities of ordinary citizens, that is, with their possibilities for becoming political beings through the self-discovery of common concerns and of models of action for realising them' (Wolin, 1996:31). Thus, Benjamin Barber argues that:

> 'In a strong democratic community … the individual members are transformed, through their participation in common seeing and common work, into citizens. Citizens are autonomous persons whom participation endows with a capacity for common vision.' (Barber, 1984:232)

Foregrounding deliberation as a central element of PB accords with this positive view of human nature. Deliberative democratic theory places dialogue and political communication at the heart of democratic processes (see Dryzek, 2000 & 1990; Bohman & Rehg, 1997; Habermas, 1984); democracy is understood to require 'equal and effective opportunity to participate in processes of collective *judgement*' (Warren, 2002:174; emphasis added). As such, it rests on a belief in citizen capacity to reflect, analyse, problem-solve and make decisions. It requires creativity: deliberation doesn't involve prioritising a set menu of choices; it is a process which forges options (Fung & Wright, 2003:18). Therefore, deliberation postulates the ability to reflect on our own preferences, values and judgements through dialogue (Dryzek & Dunleavy, 2009:216), and to listen, feel and reflect as well as speak, think and act (Barber 1984:178). It is rooted in the belief that we are not creatures of fixed preferences but are communicative, social beings, whose 'preferences' are shaped by our engagement with others in collective encounters.

A deliberative democratic system is therefore inherently collective, in contrast to aggregative systems which assume fixed preferences formed privately outside the realm of politics. In recent times, the collective nature of democracy has been powerfully articulated by Benjamin Barber, in *Strong Democracy* (1984) and associational democracy theorists (Cohen, 1996; Cohen & Rogers, 1995; Hirst, 1994). This view of democracy is explicitly supported through PB. While it insists on the importance of individual participation (thus maintaining the connection between individual involvement and outcomes), civil society organisations such as neighbourhood associations are understood to support

that engagement, as effective vehicles for collective action (see Baiocchi, 2005; Wampler & Avritzer, 2004).

Reviewing the Porto Alegre experience, Avritzer concludes that deliberation is strongly linked to changed outcomes for the poor, and itself has a democratising effect on the political culture (Avritzer, 2006), the 'negotiated solidarity' referred to earlier. This is an important point. Just as possessive individualism can foster self-interest, so egalitarian democracy can foster solidarity.

While I do not have space here to review the many debates in deliberative theory, it is worth noting that Porto Alegrean PB occupies a particular place on the theoretical deliberative democracy spectrum. Firstly, it demonstrably rejects the view that deliberation and broad participation are difficult to reconcile (Ganuza *et al*, 2014; see also Mutz, 2006). Thus, PB processes have emphasised open participation, in contrast to the model of deliberative forums based on random selection (most notably, Fishkin, 1995, see also Smith, 2009).[21] Wampler & Hartz-Karp (2012:2) note that deliberative practices associated with PB 'fall short' of the standards set out in the academic literature on deliberative democracy (see Melo & Baiocchi, 2006:589-591); however, they defend its relevance as a widespread form of actually existing deliberation, and because many PB advocates identify the crucial role of deliberation within PB in generating democratic outcomes. Arguably, for a participatory democrat, deliberation enhances the quality of decision-making; it does not generate a limit to participation.

Secondly, the interpretation of democracy inherent within PB fits with a more agonistic approach to deliberative theory which regards conflict as inescapable, rather than more procedural models emphasising consensus (see Benhabib, 1996; Cohen, 1997). In this view, difference requires more than simply mediating group interest, rather, democracy must recognise that there are no right answers and no final outcomes (Honig, 1996); disagreement is 'a permanent condition of democratic politics' (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). For

[21] This is not to suggest that mechanisms based on random selection (which is equally rooted in the idea of a civically competent citizenry) could not be instituted as part of a wider egalitarian democratic project, if linked to broad citizen participation and binding decision-making mechanisms. However, my aim here is not to evaluate different democratic approaches *per se*, but to explore the underlying values and principles behind one actually existing example of 'egalitarian democracy' and to understand how these connect to democratic appetite.

Mansbridge, embracing the presence of conflict goes hand-in-hand with recognising the role of self-interest as a realistic starting-point for engagement (traditionally frowned upon by more procedural models of deliberation) (Mansbridge, 2003:179-188; see also Mansbridge *et al*, 2010).[22] For Barber (1984:158), the incontrovertible contestability of political ends means that the responsibility of the citizen 'is not merely to choose but to judge'.

The notion that politics is about real dilemmas which may not ultimately be agreed upon but which must be acted upon, has implications which are extremely pertinent to questions of political motivation and engagement. Arguably, it is a felt need for change and the lack of a 'right' answer which gives the impetus to act, and confers responsibility – we must fight for our conception of what is needed in our society. This view is central to participatory budgeting. As Baierle puts it, PB 'attracts social conflicts and offers a political field of participation for processing it … then, the rules are important, so dissatisfied people can organise better for the next PB cycle' (Baierle, 2002:4).

Collective (participatory) politics therefore involve both solidarity and conflict, and are premised on both the capacity *and desire* of citizens for change. In foregrounding relationships and dialogue between citizens, PB fosters the development of a genuine political community. This theoretical notion has been captured effectively within Fung & Wright's discussion of the characteristics of 'countervailing power'; they argue that the qualities of countervailing power needed in adversarial conditions are very different to those appropriate to collaborative conditions (Fung & Wright, 2003:266). Thus Wampler (2007:259) refers to conflict in PB as being 'among friends' not between political rivals, an impression which perhaps encapsulates the relationship between conflict and solidarity within a collective democratic process.

PB AND THE PARTICIPATORY STATE

Reimagining the relationship between citizens and the state is a central goal of PB (Baiocchi *et al*, 2011:43; Pont, 2004), and the idea of an active political community, what Wampler & Avritzer (2004) have called 'participatory publics',

[22] While I don't have space to address this issue here, it is worth noting that Mansbridge's treatment of self-interest is very much bound up with the pursuit of social justice and the reality of striving for the common good. It explicitly does not preclude empathy or the expression of solidarity. Thus it is a materially different conception of self-interest from the neoliberal model which allies self-interest with competition in its construction of human nature.

is fundamental to this.[23] Unlike the UK democratic structure, participatory budgeting (which has been from the start supported by both state and civil society) is intended to be enabling not power-hoarding. This coheres with participatory theories of the state. Liberal democracy aims to protect people from the state; participatory governance facilitates self-rule and emancipation (Bevir, 2010:126). Thus (as I explored in chapter 3), the possessive-individualist democratic narrative presents the state as 'a necessary evil' safeguarding liberty, property and trade, whereas within the egalitarian narrative the ideal state is a 'collective achievement' of the people, who are close enough to it to use it for public benefit.

In this light, it is striking that the literature on PB overwhelmingly reflects the aim of increased proximity between citizens and the state. Thus, former mayor Raul Pont (2004:117) states that 'because of its capacity to mobilise and enlighten, participatory democracy allows people to understand the state and begin to control it'. Baierle (2002:1) asks if it is possible for the state to act as a social movement (by which he means facilitating civic participation and aimed at social transformation), a form of words which reminds us that the PT, as a political party born of social movements, itself represents the goal of the state and the people in closer proximity. In practice, the physical decentralisation of the administration, via meetings held at neighbourhood level, provided citizens with unprecedented access to state officials (Wampler, 2000:2) and so to the authority and technical expertise that they represent. As we have seen, PB facilitated collaborative relationships between autonomous citizens and officials at the intersection of civil and political society (Wampler, 2007; Santos, 1998:491), indicating a deliberate blurring of boundaries between the two.

The goal of greater proximity between state and citizen is the context for a similarly reimagined model of representation under PB, one which strongly recalls the Anti-Federalist themes of accountability through substantive relationships and delegation (indeed, in Porto Alegrean PB, the term 'delegate' is used in preference to 'representative'). Firstly, a great deal of attention is given to the mechanisms by which citizens ensure that their delegates adhere to the collective intentions of the people they represent; 'autonomy' on the part

[23] While the aims are clear, achieving genuinely transformed relationships is of course a process of negotiation and struggle. I will discuss this issue in more detail later in the chapter.

of representatives is regarded with suspicion as enabling clientelism (Santos, 1998:488). Thus, PB councillors and delegates are subject to instant recall (Baiocchi, 2005:77), links are maintained with budget forums in order to facilitate 'constant exchange' between delegates and popular communities (Baierle, 2007:81), and 'retorno' is emphasised (as I have mentioned) to guard against the positions of delegates simply reflecting their own preferences (levels of consultation prior to decisions and feedback afterwards are monitored by CIDADE) (Santos, 1998:488). This relationship allows for a much more active role for non-elected citizens; representation appears as a partnership. Former mayor Olívio Dutra (2014:10) contrasts the widespread daily, conscious exercise of citizenship with representative democracy, in which the elected official simply replaces the voter.

Secondly, avoiding the professionalisation of representation is regarded as crucial within PB (again echoing the Anti-Federalists). To this end, no delegate can serve more than two years in any position (Baiocchi, 2005:77), deliberately ensuring a rotation of delegates in order to limit the likelihood of 'capture' by the state (Wampler, 2007:77). The suggestion that PB councillors' term be increased to two years (so that knowledge could be more effectively transmitted) was fiercely debated by the COP and ultimately voted down on the grounds of potential professionalisation (Santos, 1998:489). This underlines not only the citizen-based model of representation, but the fact that the parameters of what constitutes 'good' democracy remain in the hands of the people.

Finally, the fact that delegates are elected in proportion to turnout at neighbourhood meetings further strengthens the link between delegates and citizens. In this sense, representation has to be earned, and mobilisation at neighbourhood meetings is accordingly high (Wampler, 2007:54). There is thus a direct link between increased mobilisation and outcomes, unlike representative democracy where, as I discussed in the previous chapter, each citizen's individual participation makes very little difference to overall outcomes.

This model of representation of course coexists with the more traditionally elected legislature. Indeed, this combination (of representative and participatory traditions) is deemed a key principle of PB, arguably because PB needs to be connected to the existing location of power if it is to be a meaningful decision-

making space. Reviewing the experience in Porto Alegre, Baiocchi *et al* conclude that:

> 'In contrast to the assumption in much of the democracy literature (as well as neoliberal views of governance), that participation and representation do not sit well together, instituted participatory democracy can produce collaborative arrangements between officials and civil society actors that strengthen both governance and democracy.' (Baiocchi *et al*, 2011:159).

However, in considering the combination of representative and participatory processes a key principle, protagonists do not mean that there cannot be tension between them. As within collaborative decision-making, it is important that this is recognised and that PB provides a forum for constructive conflict and challenge. The combination of systems therefore implies something about the place of PB relative to the representative system – actors within that system must be obliged to engage with PB as a legitimate decision-making forum.

While the evidence I have considered supports this view, it is important to note that 'representative democracy' is not a fixed variable when participatory processes are introduced. The values and narrative espoused by the representative actors matter. In the case of Porto Alegre, there were some representative actors (the mayor's office and the PT) with a strong existing commitment to participatory democracy, and others in the legislature who became bound by participatory democracy (being constrained from voting against the people's budget). Arguably, therefore, the strengthening occurs because the nature of representation is *changed* through the participatory process. A successful participatory initiative in this sense brings the local expressions of representative and participatory democracy closer together in terms of their underpinning narratives.

The character of equality (and freedom) in PB

Before considering the extent to which the values and principles I have discussed so far represent a significant shift in sovereignty, I want to briefly reflect on the two other notable features of democratic approach: equality and freedom.

An egalitarian approach to democracy unsurprisingly rests on a substantive view of equality, and this was indisputably a foundational aim of PB in Porto Alegre (Baierle, 2007:81; Wampler, 2000:18; Abers, 2000:50). For Baierle (2002:2), the 'social justice criteria … implies the notion of social inequality as an unfair situation that must be [fought] as government's number one priority'. This commitment to substantive equality is visible in the redistributive outcomes of the process. PB also addresses substantive political equality, rather than equality of opportunity, via attention to democratic education needs, as I have discussed. In Porto Alegre, citizens with low levels of information and expertise are making important public decisions (Wampler, 2000:16).

Furthermore, the relationship between substantive and political equality has been carefully considered (recognising that substantive inequality inhibits political equality). Thus, for example, the poorest region of the city (Ilhas) carries the same decisional weight as the wealthiest region (the Centro), though that has more than fifty times the number of residents (Santos, 1998:484-485). Baiocchi (2001) considers the problem of substantive inequality and concludes that Porto Alegrean PB can lay claim to a sufficient level of political equality, as evidenced by both participation statistics and outcomes. PB is clearly not a magic bullet in regard to political equality (as with women, the very poor are not as well represented in the COP as at other levels of participation, for example); however, deliberation through PB does lead to investments that benefit poor areas (Avritzer, 2006:631).

While conceptions of liberty within PB are not foregrounded in the way that equality is, it is clear that the implied understanding is a concern with human flourishing, as befits a focus on substantive rather than formal equality. Thus PB advocate Ubiratan de Souza describes how the control of public finances, 'held together by a sense of solidarity … has given birth to an awareness amongst citizens of their own capacity for freedom … [the] result of ordinary citizens discovering the power of collective action' (de Souza, 2004:61). This suggests a more widespread and tangible freedom than the abstract liberty of liberalism, in whose name governments protect the poor as well as the rich from state interference with their prospects. In contrast, the freedom of participatory democracy is rooted in the idea that by acting together we can change our context; the goal is to enlarge the scope of what is possible for everyone.

A SOVEREIGN PEOPLE?

PB is evidently a 'supply-side' response to the problem of the democratic deficit, in that it fundamentally reformed how the state operates, not only the means by which people engage with existing decision-making mechanisms. It also consciously allows for and encourages learning amongst state officials as well as citizens, who in turn are viewed unmistakably as a source of solutions and knowledge rather than a problem to be addressed. On this point, Baierle is unequivocal. He says:

> '*There was a time when … the conclusion was that there was a deficit of people, not of power. In the last 20 years, the popular classes of this country broke through the seclusion wall that was separating them from an autonomous political participation*.' (Baierle, 2007:77)

In articulating so vividly the people as political catalyst, he brings us to what I have suggested may be regarded as the central issue in assessing democratic deficits, the location of sovereignty. Here, the logic in Porto Alegre is correspondingly clear. PB is premised on the notion of popular sovereignty, and it has demonstrably shifted the location of sovereignty towards the people.

With regards to intention, PB was built through social movements that fuelled the push for democracy, who demanded 'the right to have (political) rights', rather than favours in return for obedience (Baiocchi *et al*, 2011:42). In keeping with this commitment to empowering citizens as actors, the original PB administration made the intended location of sovereignty explicit by redesigning its administrative regions so that they matched patterns of mobilisation (Avritzer, 2006:627). Thus, Baierle (2002:2) insists that PB is not about welfare but the principle of popular sovereignty.

Importantly, sovereignty within Porto Alegrean PB was widely *perceived* as residing with the people; this is across all groups of actors, those elected as PB delegates, wider participants, and within the state itself. For example, delegates surveyed in 2003 reported a high level of belief in their authority to make decisions (Wampler, 2007:110-111), Baierle (2002:4) reports that 'people in the PB forums feel like co-mayors sometimes', and state officials articulate that their technical expertise serves the popular mandate, not the other way round (Ganuza & Baiocchi, 2012:5).

Furthermore, scholars have documented examples of activity which I would describe as the *practice* of sovereignty. Most notably, in budget meetings and forums, citizens spoke first and foremost to one another, to government officials only secondarily as needed (Wampler, 2007:278). Gianpaolo Baiocchi regards this as the creation, by the urban poor themselves, of a broader public sphere for civic discourse and deliberation (Baiocchi, 2003). With regard to state actors, the administration began to submit its own proposals to the budget process for approval, proposals which can be (and have been) rejected (Wampler, 2007:128). The changed culture from protest and confrontation to mediated conflict and negotiation referred to earlier (and the model of citizenship inherent in PB) also illustrate the shift in sovereignty, as these both depict a people engaged in solving political problems, not asking the state to solve them.

Finally, the orientation of representation and the proximity of the state and citizens reflect the notion of popular sovereignty. Baiocchi *et al* (2011) are interested in the 'chain of sovereignty', which they define as the means by which preferences transmit to the state and thus to outcomes, and which, as they document, is often broken. As we have seen, the models of state and representation within PB pay attention to maintaining this chain. I suggest this represents the attempt to *shift* sovereignty along the chain towards citizens (if the chain is 'broken' then sovereignty remains with the state).

Nonetheless, while it does represent a significant example of popular sovereignty (not least because it is rare), it is important not to lose sight of the fact that PB in Porto Alegre, even prior to 2004, was an ongoing site of struggle for democratic meaning. I have already described the contested control of the agenda within the COP. As another example, in the thematic forums, delegates tended to negotiate with the state, rather than articulate demands independently (Abers, 2000:201), leading to a danger of rubber-stamping priorities if citizen knowledge was low (Wampler, 2007:61). Furthermore, the Pont administration's decision (referred to earlier) to initiate a 'Program of Internalisation of the Participatory Budgeting' in 1997 evidently reflects the limits to state acceptance of popular sovereignty.

Even within the stated logic of the structure itself, power is not given up by the state, but shared. The legislature must approve the budget, though while it is

not impossible to refuse to do so, in practice it is a formality, as the cost of denying sewage or education to hundreds of people from poor neighbourhoods is high (Baierle, 2002:2; Abers, 2000:97; Santos, 1998:502). Therefore, while the location of sovereignty is not uncontested, PB emerges – in contrast to representative democracy which seeks to contain popular power – as a form of democracy that strongly and intelligently attempts to contain elite power.[24]

Despite this, prior to the change in administration in 2004, Baierle predicted a 'Thermidorian phase' in which the transformative process will be dramatically challenged, driven by the old impulse to put the popular classes 'back in their place' (Baierle, 2003), a prediction that appears to have been justified, as sovereignty was consciously resumed by the Fogaça administration (Baierle, 2008). Likewise, Fung & Wright (2003:35) suggested that if deliberative apparatuses become sites of genuine challenge to the power and privileges of dominant classes and elites, they are likely to seek to dismantle them. Importantly, in seeking to strengthen PB against this threat, Baierle (2003:302) focused on the challenge of deepening participants' understanding of the process as political, in a context in which 'neoliberal forces are challenging for hegemony'. Thus, sovereignty appears as precariously balanced, dependent on two opposing forces of will.

Conclusion

Participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre (1989-2004) is an example of the egalitarian democratic tradition in action. It represents a substantial attempt at popular rather than state sovereignty, which rests on very different democratic values and principles to representative systems of government, and which is linked to outcomes in popular participation, social justice and good governance that are widely recognised as impressive.

Thus, Porto Alegre not only suggests that democracy in the egalitarian tradition is a realistic proposition, but gives us an idea of what that might look like. The

[24] There is considerable discussion in the literature regarding power and deliberative mechanisms, which I do not have space to address here. See Cohen & Rogers, 2003, and Fung & Wright, 2003:259-289 for a discussion of power in relation to mechanisms they define as empowered participatory governance (EPG), including Porto Alegrean PB. In brief, Fung & Wright argue that successful EPG requires significant 'countervailing power', a notion which intuitively accords with the idea that participatory democracy attempts to contain elite power, as I have suggested. Ganuza & Francés (2012) discuss inequalities of deliberative participation with specific reference to PB processes.

democracy glimpsed in Porto Alegre is a public space in which state and people come together for the mediation of social conflicts and in which a serious, negotiated solidarity can be built. This is a form of democracy which, while it does not assume agreement or shared goals, recognises and places centre-stage the human potential for cooperation and collective action, a potential which rests on the possibility of changed outcomes. Democracy is not an opinion poll, and citizens are not vessels containing fixed preferences. Rather, citizenship is learned through practice, and encompasses judgement, relationships and reciprocity. The state is not simply a structure, but a dynamic process, a collective attempt to create conditions for human flourishing (and thus for a meaningful liberty). Democracy in this view is active, a shared and ongoing journey. Equally, it appears as difficult, fragile, and requiring defending.

Due to the intimate relationship between social and political equality, this view of democracy entails a commitment to social justice (substantive equality). Therefore, the practice of democracy is constructed to 'make a difference'; people get involved in participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre because it changes things. This presents a strong contrast with the limited role available to the many UK citizens who are dissatisfied with government performance. In Porto Alegrean PB, the process is demanding, but participation works. The evidence suggests that this is a very empowering – and motivating – realisation.

This analysis reflects a 'citizen-eye view' of democracy, not an 'engineer's-eye view'. By this I mean that it is an approach to democracy which pays attention to what it feels like to be a participant, rather than a preoccupation with pre-setting the destination (a fundamental issue that I will come back to in subsequent chapters). Thus, democracy is not so much a governance structure as a call to action, an invitation to join in the democratic conversation as a co-creator of the society we want to live in.

The egalitarian strand of democratic thought can seem defeated in Western traditions of representative democracy, but this counter-narrative in democratic theory, which challenges the assumptions made in neoliberal theoretical accounts, was brought to life in Porto Alegre. Importantly, the agenda and values of the actors matter in shaping the democratic experience. Participatory

budgeting embodies this model of democracy because the PT and their civil society allies consciously articulated radical aims and fought to implement them.

Tom Paine presented Athens as an inspiration for late eighteenth and early nineteenth century citizens struggling to change their social reality, and this is one function of Porto Alegre for democrats today. This is not to imply that it is an ideal form of egalitarian democracy; rather it is in its actual and flawed existence that it provides the means to extend our democratic imaginations. Reinvigorating democracy requires more than a critique of the status quo, and Porto Alegre represents a different way of thinking which allows us to inhabit alternative ways of being political.

This is the global symbolic importance of Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting. In the next chapters, I consider the journey that PB made in order to take root in the UK, introduce the values and motivations driving the main actors involved with the process here, and reflect on the idea illustrated by the Porto Alegrean experience after 2004 – PB as a site of (unequal) encounter between egalitarian and possessive-individualist democratic narratives.

CHAPTER 6

JOURNEY OF AN IDEA: PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING TRAVELS TO THE UK

One of the earliest participatory budgeting experiences in the UK took place in 2004, in the northern city of Bradford. Over the course of two public assemblies, local citizens from 50 community organisations in some of the city's most economically deprived wards decided how to spend £700,000 from the 'Clean, Green, Safe Neighbourhoods Fund' administered by Bradford Vision, the then Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).[1] Between 2004 and 2008, there were approximately ten PB pilots in the UK. These were primarily led by local government, though many worked closely with the PB Unit, an NGO which advocated PB and offered support to interested institutions.

In 2006, the New Labour national government took notice, creating a national reference group in partnership with the PB Unit. Hosted by the Department of Communities and Local Government, this was associated with PB making an appearance in both the 2006 Local Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* (DCLG, 2006:28) and the 2008 White Paper *Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power* (DCLG, 2008a:67-69), and led to the publication of a Participatory Budgeting National Strategy in 2008: *Giving more people a say in local spending* (DCLG, 2008b). To date, a total of over 25 million pounds has been allocated using what is here referred to as PB (PB Network, 2014a; 2014b), across public policy arenas including community development, health, policing, highway maintenance and the environment.[2]

However, a closer examination of UK PB practices immediately reveals a very different scenario to Porto Alegre. This expenditure has in general been through discrete initiatives across many different towns and cities, often small-scale in terms of resources, and it has frequently taken the form of participatory grant-making, distributing public funds to voluntary and community sector bodies rather than involving citizens in allocating core state expenditure. On the other hand, PB is clearly distinguishable from more traditional engagement

[1] Local Strategic Partnerships were a New Labour initiative intended to bring together stakeholders such as public services and the Voluntary and Community Sector.
[2] While 'participatory budgeting' in the UK does not refer to the same set of practices, values and goals discussed in relation to Porto Alegre, in this and subsequent chapters I will use the term to refer to practices that are given the name here.

mechanisms. In practice, it gives binding control over resources (citizen decisions within UK PB processes are honoured), it invites ideas as well as opinions (citizens are invited to propose projects, not to choose between existing options), and it is based on direct participation by citizens (present as individuals, not community representatives). In 2008, the PB Unit published a set of 'values, principles and standards', modelled on the tenets of Porto Alegrean PB (Waters & Jackson, 2008; see also, PB Unit, 2009), through which they aspired to 'set minimum expectations for the way PB is implemented in the UK, and to help ensure integrity in PB projects' (Waters & Jackson, 2008:5).[3]

Nevertheless, most of the UK cases would not qualify as PB according to widely accepted definitions, being neither city-level, meaningfully deliberative or repeated annually (Sintomer *et al*, 2012:2-3). Accordingly, participatory budgeting in the UK has not up to now attracted tremendous interest within the international PB literature. However, where the UK does get a mention, it has been assessed relatively positively in terms of its orientation towards participatory democracy. Proposing a typology of European processes labelled as PB, which ranges at one end of the spectrum from 'Porto Alegre adapted for Europe' to 'consultation on public finances' at the other, Yves Sintomer *et al* (2008) locate the UK in their 'community funds' category. While they note the modest level of impact to date, they consider this, alongside 'Porto Alegre adapted for Europe', to have the greatest potential for increased social justice, as well as for realising empowered participatory governance.

Updating the typology a few years later, they remain positive but are perhaps more cautionary, considering the UK to fall broadly under the category of 'community development', and suggesting that while rooted in an empowerment agenda, such processes need to look beyond the micro-local to the transformation of institutional politics (Sintomer *et al*, 2012:25-27). This conclusion is echoed by both Baiocchi & Ganuza (2014:41) and Hall & Röcke, who, while they consider the diversity, number and scale of UK PB experiences positive, suggest that their transformative value is 'questionable' on the grounds of their small-scale nature, and the need for them to be embedded in broader political reforms. (Hall & Röcke, 2013:195-196).

[3] Since the demise of the PB Unit, the volunteer-run PB Network continues to share and promote these principles.

With the question of addressing democratic engagement in mind, I am, however, primarily concerned with what the UK can learn through PB, rather than vice versa. In the context of the UK democratic deficit, the arrival of participatory budgeting is of interest for at least four important reasons. Firstly, the original impetus to PB in the UK came directly from Porto Alegre, largely via an exchange involving community activists from Manchester and Porto Alegre under the auspices of an NGO, Church Action on Poverty (CAP). The normative social justice agenda that prompted the visits has been consistently maintained through advocacy for PB by the PB Unit (originally a CAP project, this ran from 2000 to 2012) and now via its volunteer-run successor, the PB Network. As a result the scale of ambition for PB continues to reflect broader values which are very much in the egalitarian democratic tradition, and which go far beyond those reasonably implied by current practice. [4] This element of the UK experience is also considered by some to indicate greater potential for building an empowered partnership between the state and civil society than many other European cases (Allegretti & Herzberg, 2004:18-19).

Secondly, PB in the UK is distinguished from many similar-scale participatory initiatives in that it was not led by national government, but began as a spreading local innovation, which only later attracted government support. This is significant because, in an environment characterised by a high degree of centralisation (Wilson & Game, 2006:157), it meant that PB was able to develop in less prescribed ways than nationally designed initiatives, and thus offered much greater scope for democratic learning through experience. This is also reflected in the variation between processes at local level. When, in July 2007, newly appointed Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Hazel Blears stated her intention that every local authority would be using PB by 2012, alongside an 'announcement' of 10 pilots (Newcastle and Bradford amongst them) (Wintour, 2007), at least 5 of these 'pilots' were rather surprised, as they were already up and running on their own initiative. There have been later attempts to codify PB as a technique and manage its spread from above; as a result, the earlier processes are likely to be more interesting in this respect.

Thirdly, as a decision-making process without encultured 'baggage', it offers the potential for a freer expression of 'democratic values'. In keeping with the

[4] The nature of this support arguably explains the value-base identified by Sintomer *et al* (2008).

hegemonic success of the representative definition of democracy, many people have internalised ‘truths’ about democracy, which by and large reflect the elitist democratic narrative associated with representative democracy. We are, after all, a 'democracy' and therefore our system of representation, voting and elite decision-making is what 'democracy' is. Within PB processes, people are less constrained by what they are used to knowing about 'democracy', and accordingly freer to enact their own instinctive sense about the relationship between people and decisions, which as I will explore in the following chapters, may in practice be closer to the egalitarian tradition represented by PB.

Finally, as an attempt to introduce a participatory process reflecting egalitarian democratic values within an established representative system, it embodies an encounter between these two narratives. As such, it offers the opportunity to consider potential for developing different expressions of democracy, and the likely reaction of the existing power system to ideas which could be said to pose a fundamental challenge to the location of power and sovereignty, and to our taken-for-granted ‘truths’ about democracy.

Given the condition of British democracy indicated in chapter four, it is not difficult to understand why Porto Alegre has inspired activity in the hope of generating similar outcomes. This illustrates how the struggle between different democratic narratives is alive today in people’s experiences and aspirations. This chapter will reflect on the significance of PB in the UK as a point of encounter between the two narratives, through an exploration of the forces which have shaped it, including the hopes and intentions animating its development. I will also locate the UK experience in terms of the key PB principles outlined in the last chapter. It is not my aim to evaluate either the performance or prospects of UK participatory budgeting, but rather to explore what we can learn from this encounter about the current democratic deficit and therefore about the development of democratic energy and appetite.

I will begin by considering the literature on the spread of PB from Brazil to Europe, and reflect on what this analysis contributes to a study of PB in the UK.

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Following the first wave of literature on PB, which analysed the achievements of Porto Alegre and other noteworthy individual cases, a second, perhaps more

critical wave sought to understand why the spread of PB across Brazil and globally had generated very variable effects compared to Porto Alegre. While this endeavour immediately encounters problems of generalisability, as systems and contexts differ so enormously (Baiocchi *et al*, 2011:59-60; Cabannes, 2004:35), there is a coherent thread providing evidence that less rigorous PB (in other words, less institutionalised, with fewer opportunities for deliberation, fewer resources and less binding mechanisms for decision-making) inevitably generates poorer outcomes, including less engagement and more limited participation (Sintomer *et al*, 2008; Wampler, 2007; Goldfrank, 2007; Avritzer, 2006; Baiocchi, 2005; Wampler & Avritzer, 2004).

While this in itself is fairly unsurprising, it is a starting point for attempts to understand the contexts in which effective system design is likely to occur. Suggested 'indicators of success' in this sense, include:

- A mobilised citizenry capable of both cooperation and contestation;[5]
- Political commitment;[6]
- Fiscal decentralisation, and thus adequate discretionary finances available for the process;[7]
- Operational autonomy, therefore political decentralisation, but (for example) mayoral fiscal control, to allow for delegation to citizens.[8]

Taken together, these factors emphasise the availability of power which can be harnessed to the PB process, and the potential for a robust partnership between civil and political society. Goldfrank (2007:148) notes that this is enhanced by a weakly institutionalised political opposition, as that allows for more direct engagement between the mayor and citizens. This has been articulated as civil and political society 'joining the same project'; thus, alongside their scope for action, the nature of political and civil society organisations as internally democratic and committed to promoting participation, is seen to be important (Wampler & Avritzer, 2004:38; see also, Abers 2000).

[5] Sintomer *et al*, 2012:20; Marquetti 2005:19; Wampler, 2007:38; Baiocchi, 2005; Cabannes, 2004:40, Allegretti & Herzberg, 2004:17.
[6] Sintomer *et al*, 2012:20; Marquetti 2005:19; Allegretti & Herzberg, 2004:17; Wampler, 2000:23-4.
[7] Goldfrank, 2007:147-148; Marquetti 2005:19; Allegretti & Herzberg, 2004:17; Wampler 2000:28; Abers 2000:105.
[8] Wampler, 2007:36; Goldfrank, 2007:147-148; Allegretti & Herzberg, 2004:17; Abers 2000:105.

Overall, there is a strong message from the literature that participatory budgeting is not a technical fix, and that its use does not guarantee outcomes. Rather, Baiocchi *et al* (20011:3) consider the willingness to experiment with a blueprint and transform it a hallmark of successful PB processes. This contrasts strongly with the approach of some technocrats, international agencies and NGOs who are understood to regard PB as a recipe for 'implanting' participation and transparency (Cabannes, 2004:40).

A second, related aspect of the comparative literature (one which has received increasing attention in recent years), takes the problem of generalisability as a point of departure and asks what values and practices are actually travelling under the name of participatory budgeting. A number of commentators have proposed classification schemes, which include an explicit judgment on the extent to which processes can actually be considered 'participatory budgeting'. In addition to Sintomer *et al*'s typology referred to earlier (2008, 2012, 2013a), Marquetti (2005) distinguishes low to high intensity PB (depending on the proportion of the budget involved) from communitarian PB (engagement via organisations rather than individuals) and public hearings (consultative approaches), Wampler (2007) classifies cases according to the relationship between levels of political will and civil society mobilisation, and Baiocchi *et al* (2011:79) take care to differentiate between full (binding) PB and consultation.

In this vein, Baiocchi & Ganuza suggest four dimensions for judging PB experiments: the primacy of the participatory forums (whether they are the principal point of contact between government and citizen), the scope and importance of the issues covered by the budget, the degree of actual participatory power over the budget, and the degree to which participants are able to determine the rules of the budget (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2014:39). These questions focus our attention on the significance of the PB process to wider decision-making structures, and so address the question of the relationship between the participatory and representative systems.

Overall, therefore, an important distinction is made between PB as one component of a broader movement for renewal, based on interaction between the state and grassroots movements (as the previous chapter describes, this was undoubtedly the case in Porto Alegre), and PB as a technical device (see

Ganuza & Baiocchi, 2012; Sintomer *et al*, 2012).[9] These two approaches to PB are clearly associated with different rationales for its use. Cabannes (2004:38) identifies three: to improve administrative efficiency, to generate social outcomes (for example, redistributive), and to 'democratise democracy'. These are not mutually exclusive, but the two approaches appear to flow from different primary rationales, which in turn imply different democratic values.

At the more radical end of the spectrum, PB retains the values explored in the previous chapter, and is associated with the same social justice discourse. Ganuza & Baiocchi (2012:1-3) consider this as most applicable to the 'Brazilian phase' of spread, in which PB 'travels intact as a piece of political strategy', based on the recognition that PB was successful because it was part of a whole administrative system. Importantly, this indicates a coherent set of values underpinning the democratic project in that locality. In Europe, similarly value-driven experiences have occurred to an extent in Italy, and most notably in the Spanish cities of Seville and Cordoba, where the *Izquierda Unida* (United Left) played a major role (Sintomer *et al*, 2012:10; Talpin, 2007; Allegretti & Herzberg, 2004). Here, there was an emphasis on transparency, power-sharing, and redistribution, with an explicitly stated desire for cooperation between the state and citizens against private interests (Talpin, 2007:8-9). Of course, these values remain contested, as was amply demonstrated in Porto Alegre itself.

Turning to the practice of PB as a technical device, its proliferation in this form is largely connected to the role of international organisations known for their neoliberal, pro-market agenda, in particular the World Bank, which has in recent years surpassed the PT as PB's most influential exponent (Goldfrank, 2012). Abstracted from local democratic thinking and negotiation, PB becomes politically neutral, a 'best practice' device codified in training manuals and applied by expert knowledge. Here, there is a clear association with the measurement culture of New Public Management. Rather than the robust partnership of political and civil society described above, the local state is likely to be the lead player (though citizens are not absent, Sintomer *et al*, 2012:17).

This approach coheres with an impetus based on good governance, associated with the marginalisation or exclusion of the other two major rationales, and

[9] I have explored this distinction with reference to the UK in an earlier paper (Blakey, 2008), in which I developed some of the ideas presented in later sections of this chapter.

arguably, with attempts to render PB into a form more acceptable to the possessive-individualist model of democracy. Consequently, Baiocchi & Ganuza conclude that the communicative dimensions of PB have travelled well, but the empowerment dimensions have not (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2014). Social justice principles are squeezed out as PB is lauded for its value neutrality; plus there is a view within the World Bank that PB is only needed in the absence of 'democratic participation' as it can be a costly 'repetition' of representative democracy (Ganuza & Baiocchi, 2012:8-9).

This approach is prevalent in Europe, in particular France and Germany, where PB tends towards the consultative end of the spectrum, and lacks a real recognition of citizens as joint decision-makers (Sintomer *et al*, 2008; Allegretti & Herzberg, 2004). Thus PB in Europe tends to fit the 'good governance' model. The rationale of 'democratising democracy' is also commonly articulated, but within a context where the European political class tends towards seeing PB as a threat to the sovereignty of representative democracy (Allegretti & Herzberg, 2004:17). Finally, it is clear that in Europe there is, broadly speaking, no such 'inversion of priorities' as seen in Brazil – either in intention or outcomes (Sintomer *et al*, 2012:8-11).[10]

This sober analysis does not, however, imply a deterministic view of the prospects for democratic learning. Cabannes (2004:40) ascribes the importance of a mobilised citizenry to its ability to protect against the purely technical implementation of PB, and Baiocchi & Ganuza emphasise the importance of connections between PB campaigns and other movements for democratic control of the state (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2014:44). Close analysis of decision-making in European PB suggests that while local politicians retain high levels of influence in budget decisions, citizens are not naïve, and – aware of the risks of manipulation and co-option – set up strategies to counter this and maximise their influence (Talpin, 2007). Thus, the 'competing logics of participation, representation and what counts as expert knowledge can come to clash within even the most well-organised PB process' (Ganuza & Baiocchi, 2012:9) – well-organised, of course, in this instance meaning 'controlled'. Accordingly, PB is understood to act as a platform for learning, even in situations where the process is decoupled from broader reforms (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2014:45).

[10] Arguably, elements of both approaches are present in the UK, as I will explore.

Neither is the dynamic as simple as 'citizens versus the state'. While the question of whether citizens can use PB to mount a practical opposition to the state is considered key (Ganuza & Baiocchi, 2012:9-10), as the situation in the UK bears witness, officials (and potentially even elected representatives) may also use participatory processes in a way that seeks to subvert the over-riding logic of their context.[11] Thus, Baiocchi *et al* (2011) explore the impact of PB, not by comparing 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' PB as has been the most common approach to date, but by pairing municipalities using PB with localities that display similar contextual features but which are not using PB.

This is based on the explicit recognition that what might be seen as 'failure' compared to the outcomes witnessed in Porto Alegre, might still represent progress in a different political context (*op. cit*.:10). Their cases therefore do not fit the 'ideal context' outlined earlier, having, for example, a lack of organised civil society allies or limited fiscal resources, yet their findings offer grounds for cautious optimism. Overall, the political culture of 'control' cities continued as usual, while the cities using PB experienced a rupture with past practices.

In keeping with the conception of democracy as attitude not structure, they do not reify the role of PB, recognising that, in one of their matched pairs, the extraordinarily active civil society of Diadema (the birthplace of the PT) fared better than its PB partner, and reflecting on other binding forms of participatory democracy such as decentralised planning in the Indian state of Kerala. Similarly, they document the choices of the impoverished Brazilian town of Camaragibe, which broke with PB 'best practice' in channelling participation away from direct investment towards managing externally funded services such as healthcare because the lack of state resources meant external funding was a more significant focus for democratic control. The resulting Participatory Administration was 'not PB' but was formal and binding and had positive outcomes (*op. cit*.:93-99). They conclude that the malleability of participation in pursuit of civil society inclusion is a key lesson – though Baiocchi (writing with

[11] Even in relation to the World Bank, Goldfrank (2012) argues that unintended consequences can result. While some within the Bank promote PB as part of a standard pro-market agenda, there are radical elements who share the original Porto Alegrean aims, and moreover, the Bank has little or no control over outcomes in the locality. As a result, he argues that the role of the World Bank in propagating PB should be encouraged. While this is a controversial and debatable position, it does draw attention to the fact that even situations which seem less than hopeful from an egalitarian democratic viewpoint can be sites of democratic struggle.

Ernesto Ganuza) later warns of the dangers of accepting artificial limits to participation even in 'non-ideal' circumstances (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2014:44-45). Similarly, I would suggest that conscious attention to furthering the enactment of sovereignty by citizens is a vital element in challenging such limits. What the literature tells us about PB is that it can, in certain circumstances (particularly regarding the intentions of key actors rather than specified political contexts) provide an effective way for this to be facilitated.

In a similar vein, Nylen (2003:164-155) provides an overview of what North America can learn from participatory democratic experiments in Brazil, which to the extent that our context shares similarities, is pertinent to the development of participatory budgeting in the UK. Alongside empirically demonstrating an alternative, providing evidence that democracy is enhanced by introducing more non-elite activists into the increasingly elitist world of representative democracy, and demonstrating that participatory institutions act as 'schools of democracy', Nylen suggests that Brazil both allows proponents of participatory democracy to learn from strategy and design regarding 'what works', and alerts us to pitfalls of implementation. Finally, he argues that Brazil teaches the need for a value commitment to participatory democracy which is decidedly not politically neutral.

Overall, this strand of analysis illustrates that democracy is a journey. What matters is that we find ways of moving in the direction we consciously choose to embrace, according to our values. I have suggested with reference to Porto Alegre that our 'citizen-eye' belief in our ability to *make a difference* through participation is vital to the question of democratic motivation. Arguably, a non-determinist view of macro democratic outcomes itself supports work on political engagement (in other words, democratic activists need ideas which help us understand how we might move forwards within our existing contexts). This, I believe, is a crucial message for the UK, which does not fit the profile of an ideal context for PB according to the analysis reviewed earlier, as I describe below.

THE UK POLITICAL CONTEXT: INHOSPITABLE TERRAIN FOR PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING?

In this section, I consider the UK context in the light of the four 'indicators of success' suggested by the comparative PB literature: a mobilised citizenry, fiscal decentralisation, operational autonomy and political will.

The evidence reviewed in chapter 4 suggests a citizenry that is civically active and interested in making a difference. Furthermore, there is some evidence of the desire for greater direct democracy. The British Social Attitudes survey canvassed opinion on various democratic reforms, including electoral reform, an increase in elected positions, and more direct democracy; of these, the idea of an increase in more direct forms of democracy received the most favourable response by a considerable margin. In terms of the egalitarian-democratic approach more broadly, 88% of respondents believed that MPs who 'break the rules' should be subject to recall by voters, and 58% believed they should be subject to recall if citizens feel they are 'not doing a very good job' (Curtice & Seyd, 2012:55-56). These views were even more pronounced in respect of respondents with a low level of faith in the current system (*op. cit*.:56-57), supporting the idea that more participatory democracy is a fruitful avenue to explore in relation to the 'democratic deficit'.

While this presents a positive picture of receptiveness to participatory reforms, importantly, the disillusion with the state that it reflects is associated with a corresponding increase in disengagement from the formal democratic system (as I discussed in chapter 4). Thus, the specific contextual factor identified in the literature, mobilisation in terms of the ability to strategically engage the state, is at a historically low ebb. This assessment is powerfully expressed by an experienced Bradford community activist:

> "*What distresses me about the current managerial structure and current voluntary-sector-as-business-culture atmosphere and the partnership mentality is the huge resources that go into it. And I just weep when I think what those resources could have achieved twenty years ago if they were mobilised by people who had a more oppositional, and more radical, and more determined, and more focused, political strategy*."[12]

This illustrates the message in the literature that access alone is insufficient, and even the desire for change may not be enough; what is needed is the capacity to engage strategically, to cooperate but also to contest if necessary.

With reference to fiscal decentralisation and operational autonomy, the UK political structures are decidedly hierarchical in character. In chapter 4, I

[12] Interview 10, community activist, Bradford, 26/02/2007.

referred to the ongoing withdrawal of power from the local to the national state, including increasing levels of non-elected local governance in many fields, including health, development and education. This has the effect of reducing both the amount and scope of funds and decision-making power in the hands of the local elected state. Furthermore, the long history of governmental structures in this country has engendered a level of bureaucratisation unmatched in Latin America. While the strength of state institutions in the UK brings many benefits, including stability, it also brings a marked bias towards procedural complexity, and reduced scope for local political innovation (not least because senior officers possess a high degree of systemic authority, through opportunities to influence the thinking and choices of elected members as well as via delegated power; Wilson & Game, 2006:291). The situation is exacerbated by the Conservative-led budget cuts, which represent a projected overall reduction in local authority funding of almost one-third by the end of 2015, with a disproportionate effect on deprived areas, and, crucially, without a corresponding reduction in responsibilities (Hastings *et al*, 2013).

However, there have been opportunities via ring-fenced budgets where sufficient operational autonomy has existed to permit the possibility of changed outcomes implied by participatory decision-making. As a result, many UK PB processes have been associated with time-limited funds, such as neighbourhood renewal programmes in economically deprived areas. While such funds present an opportunity for greater decision-making autonomy, they tend towards insulating PB from mainstream decision-making processes and funds (as is particularly illustrated by the Bradford case), and so may limit the impact of PB on existing systems. These dynamics complicate the more radical use of PB as one element within a broader movement for renewal. Furthermore, this level of dependence on non-core 'initiative' funds gave the processes (in England particularly) what one activist has described as 'weak roots', creating additional vulnerabilities when 'the tap was turned off'.[13]

Turning to political will, it is important to recognise that the situation here has different, perhaps competing, elements. Therefore, I will address New Labour's political commitment to PB, as the national government under which PB in the UK first developed, and then situate this within the wider context of a

[13] UK PB activist, personal communication, 13/02/2015.

government-led growth in new participatory spaces more broadly, before briefly mentioning the current situation under the Conservative-led coalition. Local expressions of political will are also important, and are not entirely precluded by limitations at national level (I will consider this in relation to the case studies in Newcastle and Bradford in the following chapters).

Between 2006 and 2010 there was high profile national support for PB from the New Labour administration, epitomised by the publication of the national strategy (DCLG, 2008b). In this strategy, Blears says that she believes democracy 'should be a daily practice, enriched by every part of the community' (*op. cit*.:7), and aims to 'shift power into the hands of the local communities and generate a vibrant local democracy' (*op. cit*.:11). In keeping with an egalitarian view of democracy, the strategy identifies the potential of PB in the area of citizenship learning (in particular regarding learning about the difficult trade-offs involved in political decisions) and outcomes (budgets becoming more focused on the 'right' priorities) and recognises the collective nature of democracy, valuing the fact that PB brings people together to talk about what they want (*op. cit*.:8). It rests on a positive view of human nature, the belief that people don't just vote for their own interests (*op. cit*.:14) and that citizens know best what is needed in their area (*op. cit*.:26).

However, it also reveals some of the conflicted attitudes to participatory democracy that PB analysts have observed in Europe. Its first sentence declares that 'representative democracy is widely believed to be the fairest and most effective system of governance' and defines participatory democracy as enhancing representative democracy by ensuring that representatives understand the changing priorities and views of the public (*op. cit*.:9). There is also a strong theme within the strategy around opportunities for people to 'give back to' or 'take part in' their neighbourhoods (*op. cit*.:7, 11, 13), emphasising community cohesion, rather than democratic, outcomes. Nowhere does the strategy explicitly recognise a problem to be solved with the state, therefore there is no conscious attention to enabling the resolution of potential conflicts or tension with existing state decision-making processes.

As a result, the strategy does not foreground 'changed outcomes' as an impetus for PB (therefore, there is no mention of anything approaching social justice or

an ‘inversion of priorities’). Rather, the strategy is said to present PB as ‘a particularly effective activity which can achieve real engagement with local people’ (*op. cit*.:10). This undeniably complicates the extent to which it can be considered a ‘supply-side’ response to the democratic deficit. This is important, because as Porto Alegre demonstrated, and as I will explore in subsequent chapters with reference to the UK, the idea of changed outcomes is centrally linked to citizens’ motivation to participate.

Ultimately, the strategy does not seek to shift the location of sovereignty. It encourages the dissemination of good practice via training courses, learning sets and tool-kits (*op. cit*.:9, 16-7, 26), but leaves PB at the discretion of public bodies. It emphasises how it can help public decision-makers ‘respond to the concerns of local people more effectively’ (*op. cit*.:16), rather than how citizens can exercise power directly (it is perhaps significant that the strategy refers to people and communities – never citizens).[14] The proposed articulation between participatory and representative systems is therefore distinctly limited.[15]

While the publication of a national PB strategy was consistent with a considerable increase in a wider range of innovative participatory mechanisms for engagement (Davidson & Elstub, 2014; Birch, 2002), the limits to its ambition (as described above) are equally in keeping with the view that these new participatory spaces emerged from an essentially government-led project to ‘mobilise citizen consent’ with respect to non-negotiable government policies (Davies, 2012), in a consciously de-politicised policy context (Burnham, 2001). Thus, Bernard Crick (2002:488) noted with concern that the New Labour leadership talked more often about ‘volunteering’ than ‘citizenship’. The exclusion of alternative policy goals explicitly minimises the scope for the expression of conflict, as is illustrated by the PB Strategy’s reticence regarding ‘changed outcomes’. Research into Bradford’s more formal partnership structures for community participation reinforces this point: the new participatory space emerged as an increasingly depoliticised space, which ‘privatises’ overtly political voices (Blakey, 2010:188-189). Thus the overall context for such

[14] I choose to use the term ‘citizen’ in relation to UK PB processes, as I have done with reference to Porto Alegre. However, it is telling that this term is used less frequently here (in that respect the PB strategy is not alone), the much less political ‘resident’ or (marginally less apolitical) ‘community member’ being more common.

[15] The Newcastle case in particular demonstrates how political support can combine with limited connections to the existing representative decision-making structures.

initiatives fits the ‘demand-side’ classification of the democratic deficit discussed in chapter 4, rather than a ‘supply-side’ approach which acknowledges a fundamental need for democratic improvement within the state itself.

In addition, the top-down nature of the approach foregrounds state officials and the professionalised voluntary sector, whose ‘job’ it increasingly is to encourage participation. The UK national reference group on participatory budgeting (which ran from 2006 to 2010) demonstrates this, being predominantly made up of national and local civil servants and council officers, with no politicians and no community members. Tellingly, Chavez identifies similarities between the new localism promoted by New Labour in the UK and Porto Alegre’s post-2004 local solidarity governance, whose policy coordinator declared that ‘in this space there is no conflict, no elections, no delegates’ (Chavez, 2006).

With the arrival of the Conservative-led coalition in 2010, PB was also briefly supported as a flagship project within David Cameron’s short-lived ‘Big Society’ discourse, which located the problem in a ‘broken’ society, and was moreover essentially anti-state in character (Bowers & Bunt, 2010; Kisby, 2010). PB did not, however, receive the same level of support from the Conservative-led government, and has faded from view in terms of national policy.

At national level therefore, even at the moment of PB’s inception, there is only limited evidence of strong political will for PB as an egalitarian-democratic project. At local level of course, the potential exists for significant variation (as I will discuss with reference to the case studies). Clearly, this does not negate the importance of a public, national commitment to PB (especially where local political will is lacking). PB organisers in Bradford described how the local development of PB was rooted in local political learning and goals, but enthusiastically welcomed the subsequent national profile; in their view: ‘*giving that permission in legislation is fantastic*’.[16]

While much of the literature appears to suggest that this overall context doesn’t bode well for democratic outcomes from PB, the work of Baiocchi *et al* (as I have said) directs our attention to how we can make a difference from this starting point. I believe that the relatively positive (if fleeting) references to the UK in the wider PB literature reflect the presence of egalitarian-democratic

[16] Interview 5, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 13/01/2007.

values amongst a wider PB community, if not within the state itself. However, the literature also provides a warning that the transmission of values through institutional design and political practice really matters in terms of generating democratic outcomes (in other words, the importance of pushing for the implementation of key principles such as binding decisions, deliberation, self-regulation, and a meaningful relationship between participatory and representative decision-making mechanisms).

PB INNOVATION IN THE UK CONTEXT

By the time of Hazel Blears' announcement of 10 participatory budgeting pilots, at least 6 localities were already experimenting with PB (see Lavan, 2007 for a comprehensive overview).[17] While Bradford and Newcastle proved to be the most influential of these, the variety across the six demonstrate the scope of early examples of PB in the UK for experiential learning and democratic innovation. In Bradford, there had been several pilots including a Neighbourhood Renewal funded town-wide process in Keighley, and a number of smaller neighbourhood or themed events. Newcastle began their PB journey with a two year pilot funded through Neighbourhood Renewal money. PB subsequently became a core part of the council's engagement work, with dedicated support for an ongoing programme, known as U-Decide. Coedpoeth was a small-scale rural process, unusual in being VCS-led. In Salford, two neighbourhoods dispersed highways improvement money via PB. Though limited in scale, Salford was significant in using core funds rather than a supplementary funding pot. The Sunderland initiative involved the distribution of New Deal funds for community chest small grants via 5 PB events. Finally, in West Dunbartonshire, an event inspired by the Sunderland process was held to disburse money for community organisations.

PB processes have proliferated since then, with upwards of 100 local authorities claiming to have undertaken some type of participatory budgeting process by 2010 (Hall & Röcke, 2013:183). However, the early examples stand out as sites of local experimentation and negotiation; many (though by no means all) of the later processes following a more codified model, disseminated in part through

[17] In addition, Harrow held an event called Harrow Open Budget in 2005. This was a purely consultative, non-binding exercise, in which participants, who were paid a small fee to attend, prioritised pre-formed budget options (see Mahony, 2008:78-122). Accordingly, this was not considered 'PB' by many actors involved in advocating or supporting PB in the UK at the time.

national promotion of the PB Unit 'tool-kit' (Rossiter, 2008), which was itself heavily influenced by the early experiences, Bradford and Newcastle in particular. Later PB cases of particular interest include Manton, Nottinghamshire, where organisers express a cautious optimism about the impact of PB on voter turnout (Hall & Röcke, 2013:187); Scarborough, where community activists challenged council officers for a greater say in PB design and oversight, and Tower Hamlets, an unusually deliberative process in which the municipal council committed a percentage of central council funds to PB. To date, aspirations for more 'mainstream' PB have not materialised, and the scope of individual PB initiatives remains limited in both aims and longevity.[18]

While this variety illustrates the nature of PB's development in the UK, the early examples in particular represent locally worked out experiments with new democratic process. In each case, the local actors, values and goals are critical. In addition, the PB Unit, with its unequivocal commitment to social justice, played a vital role in sharing stories and learning, connecting experiences, and making the connection between PB and the radical values represented by its Latin American roots. This was a two-way relationship, with key actors migrating from innovative PB localities to the Unit (including organisers from Bradford and Newcastle). It is important that the PB Unit was not a state initiative, but one housed by an NGO concerned with eradicating poverty, locating its rationale firmly within the egalitarian democratic narrative. Furthermore, it is very clear that PB would not have achieved the national profile it did without the work of the Unit over many years.[19]

In 2008, the PB Unit was named as the 'key delivery partner' in the national strategy, and became increasingly state-funded (DCLG, 2008b:9). Arguably, this had mixed implications for the Unit's role as a catalyst for PB, increasing its capacity, reach and influence but potentially compromising its identity as a

[18] Participant observation record: National Meeting of the PB Network, Tamworth, 06/11/2014. It is, however, worth noting that a new wave of interesting discussions and experiments with participatory democracy (including PB) are emerging in Scotland in the wake of the 2014 Independence Referendum, arguably as citizens come face-to-face with the limitations of what they have been used to understanding as 'democracy' (Oliver Escobar's blog on Scottish participatory practice, for the Citizen Participation Network, provides a brief overview of current developments; see Escobar, 2015).

[19] For example, when Hazel Blears came into post as Communities Minister in 2007, she drew on the work of the PB Unit and the national reference group set up in partnership between the Unit and DCLG to publicise PB as a distinctive policy associated with her ministry, in particular drawing on the Practitioner Evaluation undertaken by Kezia Lavan (2007) for the PB Unit and the International Centre for Participation Studies (Bradford University).

mobilised NGO which was capable of both cooperation and challenge. Furthermore, this coincided with an increased drive to frame civil society organisations as 'choice' not 'voice' – service delivery rather than campaigning organisations (see Blakey, 2010:197-199). This carries with it the logic of claiming professional territory and developing marketable services, a logic which the unmistakably value-driven PB Unit nevertheless operated within (and one which represented a 'push' towards operating as a PB delivery organisation rather than a campaigning network).

In negotiating these tensions, the PB Unit sought to maintain independence, and a critical distance from party politics, identifying the politicisation of PB as New Labour policy as problematic (after the 2010 general election) because 'both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democratic Parties have policies of community engagement and empowerment within which PB could sit, but as it stands [i.e. overt association with the New Labour administration] there are political vulnerabilities with PB in the UK' (Jackson, 2011:98). There is a tension here. On the one hand, this may indicate a positive recognition of the limits to the Labour agenda, as discussed above, and a tactical approach to creating space for local innovation. On the other, it may risk delinking participatory budgeting from the social justice principles which are essential to the outcomes observed in Porto Alegre.

Church Action on Poverty's 'People's Budget' campaign (linked to the PB Unit) affords an illustration of this tension. The campaign provided a menu of 'buttons to push' with councillors of different political parties, aimed at communities demanding inclusion in the budget process.[20] While this has been interpreted as the marginalisation of social justice principles (Ganuza & Baiocchi, 2012:8), I would argue that its aim was in fact to subvert mainstream policy commitments with a more radical agenda.[21] In this vein, the PB Unit promoted the idea of varying 'levels' of PB (beginning with participatory grant-making) not through abandoning the more ambitious goal, but because it was felt to be more realistic than expecting a fully developed programme to emerge from generally cautious local authorities (Hall & Röcke, 2013:193). However, tactical or subversive aims may not be sufficient in themselves. A key question is the extent to which such

[20] See http://www.thepeoplesbudget.org.uk/makethecase (Accessed 25/09/14).
[21] Participant observation record: conversations with the People's Budget coordinator, 2011-2012.

transformation is possible in practice, without explicitly and publicly embracing a commitment to social justice. This dynamic played out in two very different ways in my two case studies, as I explore in the following chapters.

Conclusion

The UK's overarching model of democracy falls within the possessive-individualist tradition: hierarchical, centralised, and designed to contain collective expressions of popular sovereignty. As a result, the 'ideal conditions' identified for transformative PB are not strongly present at national level. However, as the case studies of Newcastle and Bradford suggest, this does not mean it is impossible to creatively carve out local spaces for counter-cultural democratic experiences. Indeed, whether here or in Porto Alegre, it is the context of flawed democracy that sparks that endeavour. Therefore it is vital that we understand how such attempts work in a variety of contexts, and what they might be able to achieve. It follows, however, that our context cannot be ignored. It has particular consequences for any serious, sustained attempt to create a democratic experience framed by the egalitarian narrative, and these can only be addressed if we are aware of them. I will conclude this chapter by briefly outlining four such implications. In the following chapters, I will use the case studies of Newcastle and Bradford to explore these in more depth.

Firstly, there are clear conceptual tensions with the existing representative culture. In chapter 8, I consider how different actors' perceptions of democratic legitimacy are expressed through their behaviour in PB processes, and suggest that we are prey to 'representative habits of mind' as a direct consequence of the dominant democratic culture in the UK. Importantly, this compromises the role of the individual citizen in participatory spaces, there being an implicit understanding that legitimacy comes through representing others in your community, either through shared identity or membership of a community association. In the Newcastle case, this tendency shaped opportunities for wider engagement, and led to concerns around accountability, which in turn affected the enthusiasm of some within the state for participatory processes.

The second context issue concerns the role of voluntary sector organisations in supporting or constraining a mobilised citizenry. At the 2010 UK National Participatory Budgeting Conference, Sergio Baierle raised the absence of

citizens as a concern, asking if in the UK the voluntary sector has 'captured the social'.[22] Arguably, we need a clearer recognition that this is not a separate issue to the retention of sovereignty by the state, but intimately connected. Controlling and prescribing the role of the voluntary sector assists the state in managing the exercise of sovereignty by the people. This is exemplified by the 'delivery choice' government agenda (mentioned above), which is in direct tension with the idea of 'voice' as a primary identity for the voluntary sector.[23]

On the one hand, there is evidently resistance to the imposed 'choice' identity (this was described by Kevin Curley, chief executive of the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action, as the central challenge facing the sector).[24] As a Keighley voluntary sector manager from the health and social care sector (which is particularly targeted by this agenda) put it:

> '*We shouldn't just be helping decide how to share the pie; we should be asking "why isn't the pie bigger*!?"'[25]

On the other, the ideologically-driven economics of the national context often push individual organisations towards 'choice' to safeguard their existence (as witnessed, to an extent, in the story of the PB Unit itself).[26] This tension has implications for the goal of building 'a mobilised citizenry, capable of both cooperation and challenge'. With reference to PB processes, there is an acknowledged tension between individual citizen participation, and the imperative for associations to represent others (Ganuza *et al*, 2014). While the dynamics of the voluntary and community sector overall lie outside the scope of this thesis, I return to this issue briefly in chapter 9, as the role played by some local voluntary sector organisations in Bradford was instructive.

Thirdly, as in the view of the PB Unit, there is a prevalent belief that this work needs to be 'unpolitical' because the overall environment is felt to be hostile to genuinely participatory democracy, an issue I will discuss in chapter 9 through

[22] Sergio Baierle, UK PB National Conference: Participatory Budgeting and the Big Society, London, 09/11/2010.
[23] A clear expression of this agenda can be found in the green paper *Modernising Commissioning: increasing the role of charities, social, enterprises, mutual and cooperatives in public service delivery* (Cabinet Office, 2010).
[24] Participant observation record: *Building on Our Strengths*, Voluntary and Community Sector annual conference, Bradford, 31/10/2006.
[25] Interview 6, voluntary sector officer, Keighley, 16/01/2007.
[26] I have discussed this subject in more depth elsewhere, with reference to nationally-determined VCS engagement structures in Bradford (Blakey, 2010).

the lens of the Bradford PB process. Arguably, as I have said, this is a tactical means to create spaces which are subversive of the democratic culture. However, to retain the social justice principles inherent in a radical rather than technical implementation, the literature suggests this tactic must be consciously employed in conjunction with an explicitly political agenda (though not necessarily party political). Without this, the evidence indicates that transformative outcomes will be severely limited.

Actually buying into, as opposed to tactically utilising, the idea that PB is apolitical (the seductive but simplistic idea that a technical device can generate transformative outcomes however and wherever it is applied) stands in stark contrast to the aim of Porto Alegre's PB activists who made the following declaration:

> 'We seek to inaugurate a proactive agenda of social movements amid the rising banalisation of participatory processes by many governments which reduce them into a simple tool to distribute resources for social amelioration, without ties to a vision of development and without a perspective of effectively transforming the social realities in which ordinary citizens live.' (CIDADE, 2010)

It is not therefore surprising that, when visiting the UK, Baierle asked why activists were working with the Conservative-supported Big Society Network around their interest in PB, instead of building a social movement to fight the cuts.[27]

Finally, variable levels of political will and a hostile democratic culture mean it is problematic to embed genuinely participatory democratic spaces over a longer time period, and so create adequate opportunities for ongoing learning. While this is most evident in the Bradford case, Newcastle illustrates how this dynamic can also be manifested through the difficulties of finding sufficient fiscal and operational freedom to create such experiences in the first place.

While these contextual limitations do not prevent us starting from where we are and trying to improve the democratic environment, they do direct our attention

[27] Participant observation record: UK PB National Conference: *Participatory Budgeting and the Big Society*, London, 09/11/2010 (the conference took place in the first months of the Conservative-led coalition government).

to two important questions. Firstly, to what extent can individual citizens be empowered to negotiate a collective voice within any new structures, despite the individualising and disenfranchising tendencies of the representative political culture? Arenas which promise empowerment but ultimately do not enable it, risk further demobilising a distrustful citizenry. Secondly, to what extent is it necessary to maintain a political agenda despite the depoliticising logic of our context? In other words, is this a precondition for achieving *different* goals (such as the inversion of spending priorities witnessed in Porto Alegre)? If so (supposing that democratic motivation is related to 'making a difference'), then the relationship between democratic appetite and a political agenda of this kind may be significant. This leads us to consider not only the level but the nature of political will (in other words, the reasons for supporting PB).

Baiocchi *et al* (2011) offer a useful typology which illustrates this point (and the relationship between my two questions). They distinguish prostrate democracy (with limited will from the state and dependent civil society) from bifurcated democracy (limited will from the state but civil society capable of making autonomous demands), affirmative democracy (a willing state, and dependent civil society) and mobilised democracy (a willing state and autonomous civil society). While prostrate democracy can become affirmative or bifurcated, and bifurcated and affirmative can become mobilised, they articulate a danger that 'consultative' PB can have the effect of actually demobilising an active civil society (giving the example of the Brazilian town of Mauá, *op. cit*.:130-141).

This typology really brings alive the idea that democracy is a journey and not a structure. It helps us identify possibilities because movement is always possible, wherever you start from. While the situation even in different localities is of course both fluid and uneven, the analysis presented in chapter 4 suggests that the UK is closest to a prostrate democracy. Thus, both affirmative and bifurcated democracy are likely to represent a positive step forwards, though the danger exists for disempowering experiences to have a detrimental effect on civil society's capacity to autonomously engage the state.

The core question for my thesis relates to whether and how a mobilised citizenry capable of cooperation and challenge (in other words, citizens with an active democratic appetite) can be encouraged through experiences of direct

democracy in the UK's less than ideal circumstances. Baiocchi *et al*'s typology indicates the importance of clarity – within each local scale process, not just on the part of national activists – on the 'big picture' political philosophy behind participatory budgeting, if PB in the UK is to deliver on some of its claimed radical potential.[28]

I explore some of these conceptual issues in more depth in chapters 8 and 9, through the case studies of Newcastle and Bradford. However, it is important first to consider the potential of UK PB processes for generating democratic outcomes, given the less than ideal context described in this chapter. Therefore, in the next chapter I turn to Newcastle, which arguably represents the UK's most embedded PB programme to date, and as such provides an in-depth opportunity for reflecting on outcomes. In chapter 8, I examine the underlying democratic narratives revealed in the Newcastle case, in order to understand the extent to which the U-Decide programme represented a genuine attempt to shift sovereignty, before considering the case of Bradford in chapter 9, where a short-lived PB experiment formed part of a more radical challenge to the existing system.

[28] It is significant that such clarity is much more likely to exist in locally negotiated processes than cases where an 'off-the-peg' technical procedure is implemented by 'experts'.

CHAPTER 7

DEMOCRACY IN PRACTICE: SHARING POWER IN NEWCASTLE

As an attempt to introduce a new form of participatory decision-making into a deeply-embedded system of representative democracy, PB processes enable us to consider the democratic deficit in two ways. Firstly, they provide an opportunity for observing the extent to which a different democratic approach can impact on the quality and quantity of democratic engagement. Secondly, PB is a space in which people are able, through the tangible practice of democracy, to more freely express their conception of what it might look like. As the UK's most extensive PB programme to date, Newcastle's U-Decide programme (the local name for PB) generates insights in both these areas.

In addition to its relative scale, U-Decide is interesting because, in contrast to many UK PB processes, councillors, council officers and citizens all played active roles. U-Decide formed a key part of the local Liberal Democrat administration's strategic governance agenda, consequently the Social Policy Unit housed a small team of officers dedicated to developing PB in the city. In addition, citizens were involved in the planning for each individual PB process, via a system of working groups. Therefore it presents an ideal opportunity to explore the democratic values of, and interaction between, all three groups.

In this chapter, I explore the main achievements and limitations of the Newcastle U-Decide programme, with a particular focus on citizen democratic learning outcomes; in this regard U-Decide offers strong evidence that the experience of a different form of democracy can generate democratic learning, despite a more hostile overall context. I conclude with some reflections on what the evidence suggests about the location of sovereignty within U-Decide. I will begin by introducing the programme as a whole, and the particular processes included in this case study.

THE 'U-DECIDE' PROGRAMME

Newcastle-upon-Tyne is a city of around 250,000 inhabitants in the North East of England. It has a strong industrial past, centred on ship-building and coal. It therefore has had to navigate the difficult process of de-industrialisation in recent decades. However, Newcastle remains the heart of its region, with a

flourishing city centre. This conceals inequality, with more deprived neighbourhoods the focus of recurrent regeneration schemes.

The development of PB in Newcastle followed the election of a new administration, replacing what was generally seen as a moribund Labour administration, lending greater emphasis to the development of new thinking around decision-making. For the Liberal Democrats, U-Decide sat squarely within its overall neighbourhood management reforms, which they regarded as a fundamentally different approach to the recently departed administration.[1] Their particular interest in PB developed through council officers' involvement in a European learning network around citizen participation.[2] Inspired by hearing directly from Porto Alegrean PB activists, they visited Bradford to observe an event there, and launched a two-year pilot using Neighbourhood Renewal Funds. This utilised ring-fenced neighbourhood renewal money, therefore representing additional rather than core funding.

Citizens who expressed interest in the working group for the first U-Decide process were introduced to the concept and practice of PB through a presentation by the UK PB Unit, who made a strong link between the work in Newcastle and the process in Porto Alegre. The lead officer at the Social Policy Unit was later invited to be a member of the National PB Reference Group; enabling shared learning between Newcastle and other areas (he subsequently joined the PB Unit and then Network). By 2008, the NRF pilot had come to an end. However, the Liberal Democrat administration established a permanent U-Decide team within the council's Social Policy Unit in order to continue the development of PB in Newcastle, bringing together both councillor and officer support. At the time of my research (2008-2009), this team had supported 14 neighbourhood or themed PB processes.

My research focused on two neighbourhoods, Denton and Newburn. During the year I followed their work, the U-Decide team facilitated two events in each of these areas. Denton had been part of the original NRF pilot, whereas Newburn was new to PB. While Denton is poorer than Newburn, both are neither

[1] Interview 22, Cllr John Shipley, Leader, Newcastle Council, 26/1/2009; interview 27, Cllr David Faulkner, Deputy Leader, Newcastle Council, 02/03/2009; interview 25, ward councillor, Denton, 28/01/2009.
[2] *Partecipando*, a project of the URBACT European exchange and learning programme. See: http://www.mdrl.ro/urbactII/urbact/projects/partecipando/partecipando.html (Accessed 27/12/2014).

Newcastle's wealthiest areas, nor its most deprived. They are located close together towards the western edge of the city, and have strong local identities. Denton is a largely residential area without a central community hub of shops and services;[3] Newburn ward lies to the west of Denton, and is more rural. It comprises five villages, of which four participated in the PB process. Throckley is the largest and Blucher is the smallest (Walbottle and Newburn village also took part). The fifth village, North Walbottle, is an estate both socially and geographically separate from the other four. Both wards share a perception that they are 'forgotten areas' of Newcastle, who struggle to gain access to resources spent on more socially troubled areas of the city.[4] Within Newburn ward, there is additionally some friction between the villages, the perception in each being that '*they never get anything in their little patch*';[5] cohesion between the villages is considered an issue. Both wards have a good variety of active civil society organisations. However, there is a common perception amongst local activists that there has been a significant loss of community spirit.

The processes I observed developed as follows:

- In early 2008, the U-Decide team wrote to all ward committees in Newcastle, inviting them to run a PB process using ward funds (plus an additional £5,000 from the Social Policy budget). Councillors in 5 of the 26 wards responded positively, including Newburn and Denton (a PB process with young people ran concurrently in Walkergate ward, while processes in two other areas were provisionally scheduled to run later).

- The ward councillors in these areas worked with the U-Decide team to identify which of the three budgets available to them (ward, environmental and highways) they would use. In both Denton and Newburn, the councillors decided to use their ward budget underspend, and seek additional monies, for example from local businesses. In Newburn, with the Social Policy £5,000, this initially amounted to £16,000, and in Denton, £22,000. U-Decide processes typically

[3] This did exist in the past. As one Denton resident put it: '*the way new West Denton is built, is not a community … it's needing a heart*' (Interview 30, group interview, working group members, Denton, 26/3/2009).
[4] Interviews 17, 26, 30, 33, working group members, Denton and Newburn wards, November 2008 – April 2009.
[5] Interview 14, ward councillor, Newburn, 17/11/2008.

supported activity and resources which would not be funded via mainstream Council budgets (but might traditionally be considered by the local ward committee grants scheme).

- The U-Decide team hosted a community lunch in each ward, inviting local citizens via word of mouth and existing networks of community activists. The process was explained, and participants invited to join a working group. Council officers from different departments made a 'pitch' for the theme of the budget. In Denton, participants selected culture; in Newburn, 'cleaner, greener, safer' was chosen.

- The working groups met regularly, at least once a month, and comprised mainly experienced local activists (though the voting events attracted a wider range of citizens). Their remit was process planning, rather than decisions on how funds would be allocated. This included agreeing eligibility criteria for bids, inviting applications and planning the voting event. The working groups were supported by local councillors and the U-Decide team, who attended meetings, but described themselves as having a facilitating rather than decision-making role.

- The process was publicised by written and verbal means, including 'roadshows' from a council trailer, at times and places decided by working group members. Community organisations, service providers and individual citizens were invited to submit proposals.

- The working groups held a 'sifting day' in each ward, with the mandate to judge which bids met the agreed criteria for inclusion. In Newburn, this was preceded by a meeting between the (citizen) chair of the working group and council officers to look at technical criteria. Sifting days were supported by officers and / or councillors, though in a non-decision-making capacity. Members of the U-Decide team then either informed projects they could present at the Grand Voting Event, or gave advice on alternative sources of funding.

- Applicants were supported by council officers (members of the U-Decide team, ward coordinators and community development officers) to develop a 3-minute presentation of their idea.

- Applicant groups were given a number of tickets for the Grand Voting Event (where space allowed, additional tickets were given to groups whose ideas had not progressed to the voting event, and occasionally to wider citizens).

- In November 2008, both wards held a Grand Voting Event, at which funds were allocated by means of an electronic vote taken after each presentation (grading each project from 1-9). Between 80 and 90 people attended in each ward. At both, the U-Decide team made a surprise announcement on the day of an additional £5000 from their own budget for the 'pot', bringing the total available in Newburn to £21,000 and the total in Denton to £27,000.

- In January 2009, the U-Decide team heard that they had been successful in securing funds to run two Community Safety processes, as part of a national pilot. The funding criteria meant the theme and timescales were fixed, with the events to be held by the end of March. Because of the short deadline, the U-Decide team sought agreement from councillors in Denton and Newburn to run the events there, due to their existing experience, and the fact that there were already working groups in place.

- Both wards agreed, and ran processes following a similar format, with Grand Voting Events held in March. Between 60 and 70 people attended each event. The U-Decide team introduced a deliberative element to these events, comprising a 3 minute discussion in small groups following each presentation. These discussions were facilitated by officers and other practitioners (as opposed to citizens). Participants were able to ask questions of presenters during this period. Participants then voted twice on each project (scoring from 1 to 5), firstly on whether they believed the project would make a difference to community safety in the area, and secondly on whether they believed it represented value for money.

These events were reasonably typical of U-Decide processes, though the model did vary.[6] However, while the processes in Denton and Newburn were almost identical in structure, there were clear differences between the experiences, largely as a result of tensions between some members of the working group in Denton, and local councillors and the U-Decide team. Where the Newburn group worked closely with officers and councillors, the Denton group was seen as adversarial and unaccountable. Both involved citizens active in local community organisations; however, in Denton, a high proportion of these were existing 'community reps' on many statutory partnerships and boards. Significantly, they were used to being treated (and acting) as representatives of the community (a constituent element of what I am calling 'representative habits of mind').[7] In Denton, the tensions with the working group led to a reduction in councillor support for U-Decide in the ward, and the decision of the U-Decide team to work in other parts of the city in preference to Denton.

Locating Newcastle in terms of the key principles outlined in chapter 5, all the actors involved understood U-Decide to be binding (citizens have the power to make real decisions). The working groups were a genuinely deliberative space, and there was a commitment to increasing deliberation at voting events. Each process was set up to be internally participant-regulated, though the city-wide programme was not. Although from the council's perspective, U-Decide was an ongoing programme, there was not 'a cycle of known events' from a citizen-eye perspective; events occurred *ad hoc* in different neighbourhoods depending on the will of local councillors and the U-Decide team. In terms of the direct participation of individuals, citizens played a core role in the working group (though there was some confusion over whether the source of their legitimacy was as citizens or representatives), but participation at Grand Voting Events was generally by invite. However, there were lively debates about whether the voting events should be open to all, or to members of the applying community

[6] For example, in 2009, the U-Decide team facilitated a process in which citizens from Lemington ward were asked to choose between a number of proposals for environmental improvements, all of which would be carried out by the Council. This process was also of note because the voting occurred in multiple venues around the neighbourhood, over one weekend, thus attracting much wider participation. This illustrates the development of thinking about participation and decision-making within the programme. However, U-Decide in Newcastle is currently dormant, following a shift in political control from the Liberal Democrats to Labour in 2011 (arguably associated with local reactions to the national Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition rather than the local performance or approach of the local administration in Newcastle).

[7] In the next chapter, I will explore the nature of accountability in relation to this dynamic, and its implications for sovereignty.

groups. With regard to social justice intention, this was framed as ‘improved services’ for all, rather than a more radical goal relating to inequality. Therefore, while the political commitment to improved participation was strong, it was not explicitly rooted in the recognition that the status quo is failing the poorest members of society.

The final key principle is that PB should combine representative and participatory democratic traditions. While U-Decide did this in the sense that it was rooted within the representative democratic state, it existed as a discrete space, and as such did not necessarily offer a challenge to existing decision-making mechanisms (as I noted in relation to Porto Alegre, the emphasis on a connection between representative and participatory processes does not imply a non-conflictual relationship, but rather an engaged relationship, whereby one system cannot realistically ignore the other).

It is for this reason that Baiocchi & Ganuza (2014:39) direct our attention to the primacy of the forum, and the scope of the decisions involved. These components reveal the principal limitation of the U-Decide programme. Dealing primarily with ‘extras’ rather than core services, it was one of a menu of options for engaging with the council (other options included ward committee meetings, which consider and fund comparable projects to those submitted to U-Decide). U-Decide was therefore an entirely discrete space, rather than being structurally connected to wider decision-making processes. While new initiatives of this kind are almost inevitably small-scale, in the following chapter I consider the nature of this particular dynamic in terms of U-Decide’s potential for mounting a genuine challenge to the existing democratic narrative.

Turning to the context factors identified as favourable in the international comparative PB literature, the central involvement of the Liberal Democrat administration indicates clear political will. However, fiscal and operational autonomy are not automatically available to the programme organisers, but dependent on the buy-in of individual ward councillors. Civil society is engaged, but at the level of individual processes rather than the overall programme. This set of context factors prompts the question of why, given the political will, greater fiscal and operational autonomy was not created, and thus focuses our attention on the nature of that will (in other words, on precisely what is being

supported by different actors). I will return to this issue in the next chapter. Importantly, despite the apparent contextual constraints, U-Decide offers convincing evidence that the experience of direct democracy does hold the potential to generate significant democratic outcomes.

U-DECIDE: A DEMOCRATIC EXPERIENCE

Evidence of democratic outcomes from the U-Decide programme fall under four broad headings: increased participation, greater proximity to the state, changed outcomes (i.e. evidence that democratic engagement was effective in generating decisions more closely aligned to citizen wishes) and democratic learning (on the part of citizens and also the state). These themes reflect values inherent in the egalitarian democratic tradition, including active democratic engagement, a closer relationship between the state and citizens, and a belief in the capacity of citizens to develop democratic and civic skills.

INCREASED PARTICIPATION

Citizen participation in U-Decide took two main forms: membership of the working group, and attendance at voting events. Turning first to the broader participation at voting events, in Newburn, 85 voting citizens were present at the November 2008 Grand Voting Event, and 68 at the March 2009 event; in Denton, 89 voting citizens were present at the first event, and 62 at the second.[8] Lower participation at the March events was widely attributed to the much shorter timescale for organising the process.

Participation at the voting events was restricted; invites were sent to each group or individual presenting projects (usually 4 or 6 per project) with additional tickets being allocated to groups or individuals who had suggested projects deemed ineligible at the sifting day. Working group members attended the event as voting participants; however, many also belonged to groups submitting bids. In the event of further space being available, wider citizens were invited on a fairly *ad hoc* basis, though none of the events were open invite. Participation in decision-making via the voting events represented an increase, relative to attendance at ward committee (where similar decisions about local funds were

[8] At the young people's voting event in Walkergate held in November 2008, 53 voting young people attended. Of these, there was an even division between male and female participants; 29 were under 12, and 24 between 12 and 19 years (participant observation record: Walkergate Grand Voting Event, 18/11/2008).

made). The number of citizens attending ward committee varied, but there was an accepted view that the meetings were not well attended,[9] attracting an average of perhaps 6 people (these generally being already well-known to the councillors and local officers).[10] As I will explore further in the following chapter, participants tended to express their motivation to attend in fundamentally democratic terms (the desire to participate in decision-making), indicating a clear link between this outcome and the democratic nature of the process.

In terms of participant profile, citizens attending both November events were approximately 60% female and 40% male. In March, the proportion of female participants increased to around 70% in Newburn, and 75% in Denton. At all the events, ethnicity was predominantly White, as reflects the population of both areas. The picture with regards to age is a little more varied. In Newburn, approximately a third of participants at both events were 15 or under, reflecting the high levels of engagement with schools and youth groups. The 16-24 age group was poorly represented, with only 5-6% at each event. However, at the first event, there was an even split between the remaining three age groups (25-49, 50-64, 65 and over). At the March event, there was a very slightly increased proportion of the 65 and over group, relative to the 25-49 and 50-64 groups. In Denton, approximately a quarter of all participants at both events were 15 or under. There was some variation across the 16 to 65 age groups across the two events, but at both, the 65 and over group was the largest group present by a substantial margin, with approximately 40% at the first (better attended) event, and over 55% at the later event. The strong attendance of older participants coheres with local (older) activist views that there has been a significant loss of community spirit amongst younger citizens (and may also partially explain the higher proportion of female participants); the relative success of Newburn in mobilising younger participants is therefore noteworthy.

Importantly, the evidence suggests that U-Decide was successful in attracting participants who were not previously involved with the state. This was partly because, while participation at voting events was restricted by invite, the main route to a voting event invitation – submitting a funding idea – was open to all citizens. The process was advertised to existing groups, but it was also

[9] Interview 27, Cllr David Faulkner, Deputy Leader, Newcastle Council, 02/03/2009.
[10] Interview 14, ward councillor, Newburn.

publicised across the ward, including fliers to every home and a week of roadshows in each area prior to an event, at which council officers and working group members spoke directly to members of the public (unsurprisingly, this was a more successful route to new involvement than fliers). Citizens were invited to submit ideas which could be fulfilled by the state (for example, requests for public seating and additional waste bins), as well as applying for funds for community groups. Area coordinators, ward councillors, community development workers, and the U-Decide team within the Social Policy Unit all reported success in reaching people '*who have never had anything to do with the council before, or haven't even been part of a formal group*'.[11] This was referenced particularly strongly in Newburn (where 127 proposals were submitted for the November event), as the area coordinator and a ward councillor reflected:

> '*There were lots of faces there that we don't see at our ward meetings. There were groups there that don't come to our ward meetings. There were normal residents who aren't part of a group, who came up with ideas. And they were very diverse, the ideas*.'[12]

> '*It must have shown us that there's about another eight or nine groups that we were never aware of, that come out of the woodwork so to speak, and we now have them on our little map of what things happen, because we didn't know about them*.'[13]

Similarly, local activists valued the participation of citizens who had not previously been involved in formal political activities, as a working group member describes:

> '*We know the people up there, but they've never really … come to any tenants and residents' meetings or anything like that*.'[14]

In Denton, though less ideas had been generated (45 proposals were considered at the sifting day)[15] the officer evaluation of the November process

[11] Participant observation record: informal interview, council officer, Social Policy Unit, 16/10/2008.
[12] Interview 13, ward councillor, Newburn, 17/11/2008.
[13] Interview 18, joint interview, area coordinators, 28/11/2008.
[14] Interview 17, working group member, Newburn ward, 28/11/2008.
[15] Participant observation record: sifting day, Denton, 12/3/09.

noted that approximately half the people present were new to U-Decide, and '*organisations new to U-Decide are putting forward proposals too*'.[16]

The second main form of engagement with U-Decide was through membership of the working group. This of course involved a much smaller number of people, but required a deeper level of commitment. In Newburn, there were initially 13 regular members of the working group (sadly, one died during the course of the planning process); in Denton, there were 11 regular members. In both groups, most members were women, and most were retired (there were 2 working age adults in each group). Given the word of mouth method of recruitment, it is not surprising that most were already known to local councillors and ward officers, as 'active citizens'. A community development officer explained that '*people are approached because we know that they are very active in the area and have a good local knowledge of the groups, and the infrastructure.*'[17]

As I have mentioned, the two working groups were quite different in character. In Newburn, the working group contained some well-known community activists. However, in the view of their local councillor, '*they wouldn't have been involved in the workings of the council per se, [they're not the sort who] go to meetings in the city centre*;'[18] rather, they were active with community organisations and groups at local level. Furthermore, one key member of the working group, a former councillor herself, but very rooted in her community rather than party politics, consciously worked to widen participation in the working group:

> '*I tried to get people involved who were on the tip, on the verge of getting involved with the community, to sort of ease them in, and I knew this would be a good project, with a good end result, that would make them feel, "we've done something."*'[19]

In contrast, many members of the Denton working group sat as citizen representatives on an impressive variety of committees and statutory forums. The following two interview extracts give a flavour of the Denton group:

> '*Do you really want to know what I'm on? [It's] a list as long as your arm! I'm on the [local] Tenants and Residents Group; I'm Secretary of that*

[16] Participant observation record: officer evaluation meeting, Denton, 03/12/2008.
[17] Interview 32, community development worker, Newcastle Council, 27/03/2009.
[18] Interview 13, ward councillor, Newburn, 17/11/2008.
[19] Interview 17, working group member, Newburn ward, 28/11/2008.

group. From there, I got elected to go onto Newcastle Tenants Federation Executive Board. Well, it's not Board; it's just Committee. And I'm also, from our tenants' group, I go onto the Denton Community Partnership, because we're allowed 4 members from each group on the DCP. I'm on the DCP, and from there I'm also on the Outer West Area Forum, and the Safer Stronger Communities Funding Neighbourhood Element, that's all through the DCP. But the Tenants' Federation is from my own Tenants' group, because I'm very involved with tenancy federation, housing and things like that. And the Tenants' Federation also has about four other working groups, which I'm involved with as well.'[20]

'*I'm on Your Homes Newcastle housing board, which is all the council houses across Newcastle, and particularly Denton. I'm on the Area-based Grant group, which was Neighbourhood Renewal … I'm still, at the moment, on the Delivery Partnership of the Local Strategic Partnership but I think I'm coming off it. I'm also on the Denton over 60s, which is the pensioners' group held in Denton. I'm on the Friends of the Matchbox, which is a local community centre. I'm on, err, trying to think! There are about 6 involved with Your Homes Newcastle from every different angle, I was on an Area Board, but we're not going to have them, and that's unofficial at the moment. I'm trying to think what I'm on. There are about 6 groups, for example the Finance, I'm on, and the Property Committee, I'm on. So there are a lot of subgroups from [Your Homes Newcastle]. I'm trying to think of the local ones… oh, the Mature Action Group, which is another older people's group. The LEAF, which is the Environmental Forum group … I was on Newcastle Empowerment Network, but that came to an end … And I'm also on the Safe Newcastle reference group. Knew there was some more somewhere*.'[21]

As another member of the working group put it, '*we're on all the committees, if we're not on 'em, they're not worth being on!*'[22] The extent to which working group members are already actively involved with the state evidently represents a limit to U-Decide's potential for engaging new citizens in that role (and, arguably, for democratic learning by working group members). Moreover, it

[20] Interview 29, working group member, Denton ward, 20/03/2009.
[21] Interview 33, working group member, Denton ward, 02/04/2009.
[22] Participant observation record: working group discussion, Denton ward, 20/03/2009.

creates a dynamic which affects engagement with the wider community, and between the working group and the state. Regarding engagement with the wider community, it is reasonable to believe that the more inclusive approach of Newburn was a factor in both the more representative age range of voting participants, and in the stronger evidence that Newburn ward was successful in reaching people new to civic engagement. It is important to note that the 'experienced reps' were by no means the only voices on the Denton group; one younger member in particular stood out as working hard to involve others, and facilitate quieter members of the group being heard. My interviews with some members of the less vocal element on the Denton group were in fact notable for deeply reflective democratic thinking. However, perhaps unsurprisingly, those used to attending formal meetings were the more dominant voices at meetings.

CITIZENS AND THE STATE

The mixed experience in Denton notwithstanding, it is clear from this review of participation that the U-Decide programme did achieve significant success in building some closer relationships between citizens and the state. The Newburn ward councillors, who played an active (but not decision-making) role in the working group, described the value of the voting events in developing wider relationships, and improving citizen views of the council:

> '*I had a better surgery there than I do at my normal surgeries … it was interesting because I got to speak to people that I wouldn't normally see, and people I hadn't known before. So I went up and said hello, and introduced myself. And from that point of view it was good. And it's strange, because I did nip out for 10 minutes because I should've had 2 surgeries, and one we put a notice on saying it was cancelled, but I went to the [other] one, which was local, and there wasn't a soul there, and yet I've got a list from [the voting event]. You know, if they see you, then they come up with things. Yes, there was people that I hadn't met before, so from that point of view it was quite good, because you're being seen by other people, you know, so when they see your surgery lists go round, they might think 'oh, I saw her' or 'I saw him at that day, now I know I can put a face to them' … It was a very, very positive event*.'[23]

[23] Interview 13, ward councillor, Newburn, 17/11/2008.

'*I think it's shown people the council in a different light, after Saturday … you know, they were going out the door saying, "by, it's been marvellous", you know, and "we'd never have been able to do it without your help" … and I'm out there and I'm seeing people.*'[24]

This was echoed by a working group member in Denton, who runs a voluntary youth group. Speaking of the young people she worked with, she said:

'*I think if nothing else, it's broken down the walls. You know, it's knocked the walls down. And made w' councillors more approachable*.'[25]

There is also evidence of greater information-sharing between communities and services. For example, because the play and youth service learned more about community-led children's activities through U-Decide, they now liaise with the Newburn summer camp project to ensure that their summer activities complement one another, rather than clashing.[26] Similarly, proposals that weren't eligible for U-Decide were passed on to the appropriate council service, and a council officer contacted each citizen to tell them where their ideas had been taken, or to offer a route forwards.[27]

In this vein, people valued tendencies in the PB processes which suggested a different kind of relationship with the state. Partnership was a common theme:

'*They are saying they can't do nothing without our help.*'[28]

'*See the difference that we've made, as a community, as a ward, with our councillors on board, backing us. But, you know, it's not just the councillors backing us; we're backing the councillors*.'[29]

'*If I've gone to council meetings in my area, you sit and listen … but with these committee meetings, I've found when you're all sitting round the table, they advise you on what's happening, but they listen as well. So it's a two-way thing, and I think that's important*.'[30]

[24] Interview 14, ward councillor, Newburn, 17/11/2008.
[25] Interview 28, working group member, Denton ward, 20/03/2009.
[26] Interview 32, community development worker, Newcastle Council, 27/03/2009.
[27] Interview 26, group interview, working group members, Newburn ward, 16/02/2009; participant observation record: sifting day, Denton ward, 21/10/2008.
[28] Interview 12i, participant, Grand Voting Event, Newburn ward, 15/11/08.
[29] Interview 28, working group member, Denton ward, 20/03/2009.
[30] Interview 12ix, working group member, Grand Voting Event, Newburn ward, 15/11/08.

Unsurprisingly, the most marked development of relationships occurred within the Newburn working group, where officers, councillors and citizens worked alongside one another. Working group members consistently praised both councillors and officers, seeing them '*in a little bit different light … you see them wanting to do a little bit for the community*.'[31] In Denton, however, positive engagement between citizens and the state was more limited. While a particularly negative tone was set by just one citizen, the resulting atmosphere led to decreased engagement by councillors, and a working group culture that officers found very difficult.[32] Furthermore, to the extent that the Denton working group members were already formally engaged with the state, the potential for achieving closer involvement was correspondingly limited.

Effective and transparent decision-making

While the impact of decisions made through U-Decide lies outside the scope of this study, it is worth noting that participants valued these outcomes highly. In the words of one working group member: '*it's all exciting; it's brought a lot of happiness and joy to all the groups that put in for it*.'[33] All the working group members I spoke to described with enthusiasm the difference that particular projects would make, many focusing on the community-building aspects of both the process itself, and the projects funded. Denton's intergenerational projects were much talked about, the youth group's successful bid for a tea dance being reciprocated by an older people's group, who secured funding to invite them to a ceilidh in return. As the volunteer youth worker describes:

> '*The feedback that we got from the older people was amazing, because they said they can now quite happily walk through a crowd of kids, because nine times out of ten, they recognise the kids, and the kids recognise them, so for us that was massive*.'[34]

At the Grand Voting Event, it was evident the young people were delighted that the older group had returned their invitation, and moreover, it was clear that the process itself gave impetus to the intergenerational work, as new relationships were built between groups that would not otherwise have become so familiar

[31] Interview 31, joint interview, working group members, Newburn ward, 26/03/2009.
[32] Participant observation record: officer evaluation meeting, Denton, 03/12/2008.
[33] Interview 17, working group member, Newburn ward, 28/11/2008.
[34] Interview 28, working group member, Denton ward, 20/03/2009.

with one another.[35] While these activities may well have been funded by other routes, their success was enhanced by the community-based planning process.

Stories such as this are important because, as Porto Alegre demonstrates, it is the prospect of changed outcomes that motivates people. Therefore participants' *belief* that U-Decide leads to different outcomes is significant. The view expressed by this Denton working group member was common:

> '*I think it's made a big difference. I mean there are some lovely projects that's been done already*.'[36]

There was a clear perception that many or most of the projects would not have happened without U-Decide,[37] that '*there's always something else that's more important, whereas this is the people's choice*.'[38] In addition, there was a shared understanding that the process encouraged people to develop ideas they would not have otherwise considered:

> '*I think we have more scope on the U-Decide … you know, you can come up with daft ideas, and some of them are daft and some of them are good, but you do have more play round with that, you know, and people's suggestions*.'[39]

Similarly, U-Decide presented an opportunity for the state to think about ideas they would not otherwise have considered, as this councillor describes:

> '*The danger is trying to find out what the play service wants to provide, rather than finding out what people actually want. There are a lot of ideas we wouldn't have thought of, certainly, which came through from the process*.'[40]

Furthermore, independent of the outcomes themselves, there is a democratic value to citizens knowing that what they want for their community has been funded, and that they had a role in making it happen. The difference between this and electing a representative to take good decisions for you is palpable:

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[35] Participant observation record: Grand Voting Event, Denton ward, 29/11/2008.
[36] Interview 29, working group member, Denton ward, 20/03/2009.
[37] Interview 26, group interview, Newburn working group members, 16/02/2009; interview 30, group interview, Denton working group members, 26/03/2009.
[38] Interview 28, working group member, Denton ward, 20/03/2009.
[39] Interview 26, group interview, Newburn working group members, 16/02/2009.
[40] Interview 20, ward councillor, Walkergate, 29/11/2008.

'*Even if one group had been helped, that was an achievement, and it was wonderful. But because of all the people that got helped, god, I was flying. Really, I've never, ever had anything to do with anything like that, and it was brilliant. Really brilliant*.'[41]

'*This was my contribution to making a difference. I couldn't have made a difference on my own … you can walk around, and you can see the things that have been put in place now, especially after, this is the 4th one coming up. You know, you can look around Denton and you can think, oh, that was because of us, and U-Decide*.'[42]

Arguably, this is the practice of citizenship, a key feature of shifting sovereignty, and a very strong indicator that democratic learning is taking place.

A 'SCHOOL FOR CITIZENSHIP'

As the views above suggest, there was evidence of clear democratic learning on the part of working group members. This came through the closer working relationship with officers and councillors, as a working group member new to civic involvement describes:

'*There were different people there from different services nearly all the time. So it was something new you were picking up, all the way along*.'[43]

This learning could be about the limits of the existing system too. For example, one (less experienced) member of Denton working group was shocked to learn that the 3 councillors had previously made funding decisions by themselves:

'*Just the 3 councillors? Never! I thought actually there was a committee of people*.'[44]

Discovering the realities of the existing system, and learning, via U-Decide, about what was possible instead, led some working group members to develop their own ideas about what 'better democracy' might look like:

'*I just wondered if it wouldn't be a better project, or a different project, to say, let's tackle something big, instead of all these small ones?*'[45]

[41] Interview 26, group interview, Newburn working group members, 16/02/2009.
[42] Interview 28, working group member, Denton ward, 20/03/2009.
[43] Interview 26, group interview, Newburn working group members, 16/02/2009.
[44] Interview 30, group interview, Denton working group members, 26/03/2009.

'*How about, we've got the next Denton ward meeting, and we say, look here, we think we're making such a good job of spending the money, we want to spend 25% of your budget. Wonder what they would say?*'[46]

'*Could we take it a step further? Could we – this is me going with me political hat on – could we do it with every lot of money that comes into the ward? Like [the] neighbourhood response manager's money? Highways and byways, their pot of money? You know, there's pots and pots of money. You know, the play and youth money*.'[47]

Crucially, it is apparent from these quotes that active learning is going on. The citizens quoted here are not endorsing a different vision of democracy; they are trying to create one. Thus, I heard numerous working group discussions about the nature of democracy. In this vein, some of the usually less vocal Denton working group members strongly challenged a councillor when he suggested that working group deliberation was the essence of U-Decide, and that the voting event was, under some circumstances, not necessary. As they told him:

'*It's not U-Decide, if there is no voting … it's only us here today – the Grand Voting Event is people getting together, the community coming out*.'[48]

Citizens' enlarged visions would often be explicitly or by implication deliberative. Thus, in Newburn ward, the following suggestion was made:

'Maybe in the future [we should] fund just one or two events, but make the communities work as a community, and see what they come up with? And if our community doesn't work, they don't go in it. It's as simple as that. If they can't come down here and hold a meeting and say well we would like this, well, then they're not worth bothering with.'[49]

In Denton, the working group discussed a similar idea:

'*It's to come up with a project idea for the whole of Denton. It's no good looking out of the window and saying I would like that there, you've got to*

[45] Interview 31, joint interview, working group members, Newburn ward, 26/03/2009.
[46] Interview 30, group interview, Denton working group members, 26/03/2009.
[47] Interview 26, group interview, Newburn working group members, 16/02/2009.
[48] Participant observation record: sifting day, Denton ward, 12/03/2009.
[49] Interview 31, joint interview, working group members, Newburn ward, 26/03/2009.

look at the whole scope of Denton, and say "we as a whole would like in Denton…"'

'We would be stronger as a community, because you would get more people involved, because they would be hands on making decisions about their money and their taxes.'[50]

While these views were not expressed by every member of the group, it is significant that *movement* in citizen views went markedly in this direction, towards a more collective and deliberative democratic process. Arguably, this occurred as their experience enlarged their understanding of what was possible (previously constrained by what is publicly understood to 'be' democracy).

Clearly, opportunities for the same depth of learning were not present for voting day participants. However, there is some evidence that even a limited taste of direct democracy can have an effect – as illustrated by these 'before and after' quotes from a Newburn citizen who volunteers with an after-school club:

'*To me, they should ask them to maybe request what they think they might need, and then a group of the people who are offering the money up sit down and say yes, well, you can have that … but that should be people who are completely outside, I mean people who are not involved in any kind of group, and that way everybody gets something*.'[51]

At the end of the day, I again asked the same participant how she was feeling:

'*Oh, I'm very, very happy actually. I've completely – I didn't understand at the beginning, to be truthful. I was just sort of roped in, to make up the numbers, but having seen it, it was fantastic … you're getting more voices, I think, really. Alright, you might get one person representing maybe a group of people going along [to a meeting], but at the end of the day, it comes across as that one person's view, at any meeting, I think, whereas this way, you have everybody. You hear everybody's view, or vote. You know, it's a better opinion for the area; I think it's very good. Because obviously, once people know about it, they'll be more inclined to get involved, and I think just basically try and get more done for their*

[50] Interview 30, group interview, Denton working group members, 26/03/2009.
[51] Interview 12vi, Grand Voting Event, Newburn ward, 15/11/2008.

area, knowing that they can have an input. I mean, I work in a local playgroup, and to be honest, I didn't even think about it, it was [my fellow volunteer] that got me involved. So, maybe the next time, my group might be putting in a bid for it. So, you learn. I've learnt something by coming. It's very good. Yes, I've enjoyed it.'[52]

Similarly, for some the experience of making decisions was powerful, with younger participants in particular commenting on both the difficulty of this, and the responsibility of making good decisions.[53] In addition, councillors, officers and citizens all felt that the increased visibility of democracy supported wider democratic learning, for example the plaques that told citizens what was funded through U-Decide ('*if one person has asked me "what's U-Decide", a hundred have*').[54] The public presence of officers and councillors at voting events was understood to play a similarly informative role ('*I think on the day, suddenly all those new people started to realise that what was available was coming from a process which they probably didn't fully understand … they started to maybe understand that there is a local democracy scene*).[55] When asked if they would do it again, across the 4 events, 95% of participants said yes.

The development of more collective civic behaviour is a related outcome. Examples included organisational support from the Denton Bowling Club for a youth group fighting to save their community centre[56] and a new community group made up of citizens who had individually suggested environmental improvements to their village.[57] There was also a hint of 'negotiated solidarity' as in Porto Alegre (what one U-Decide organiser called '*empathising with each other's cause*').[58] Thus, the Newburn working group valued the quality of collaboration across all the villages in the ward, instead of '*the north-south divide*' they had feared.[59] Importantly, finite resources still had to be divided

[52] Interview 12xi, Grand Voting Event, Newburn ward, 15/11/2008.
[53] Interviews 15i, 15vii; 15viii, 15xi, 15xii, Grand Voting Event, Walkergate ward, 18/11.2008; interview 19viii, Grand Voting Event, Denton ward, 29/11/2008.
[54] Participant observation record: U-Decide funding beneficiary, Newcastle Council U-Decide evaluation workshop, 20/04/2009.
[55] Interview 18, joint interview, area coordinators, 28/11/2008.
[56] Interview 32, community development worker, Newcastle Council, 27/03/2009.
[57] Participant observation record: Grand Voting Event, Newburn ward, 15/11/2008; officer evaluation meeting, Newburn ward, 03/12/2008.
[58] Interview 16, joint interview, council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 27/11/2008.
[59] Interview 26, group interview, Newburn working group members, 16/02/2009; interview 31, joint interview, working group members, Newburn ward, 26/03/2009.

between the villages, but the relationships and support generated (as well as the transparency of the process) transformed the experience. Similarly, the introduction of a limited deliberative element meant that some participants were able to move beyond an initial negative reaction to understanding and supporting a project (for example, after some discussion, an elderly man moved from disparaging a youth rap project to voting positively for it).[60]

For a Newburn councillor, it mattered that people saw their project '*supported by the community*':

> '*People are voting for each other. It's the wider community listening to other people in the area, and saying we'll support this. We'll support it*.'[61]

Here, again, we can see the practice of citizenship (or, to put it another way, the exercise of sovereignty) as community groups face their fellow citizens rather than the state. Thus, the community development team observed that proposals tended to do better when presented by citizens rather than officers: '*you know the community are really keen they should be up there, members of the community, asking for it*.'[62] Significantly, these outcomes are generated by collective decision-making, not simply social interaction.

Finally, as in Porto Alegre, there is evidence that PB developed citizen skills and knowledge. This included knowledge of their communities ('*you find out a lot what's going on, what you don't know about; I go to a lot of meetings [but] everything's bad information*'),[63] learning about budgeting ('*it makes you know how to spend your money, and how to spend it wisely*'),[64] and communication skills ('*community development outcomes, the confidence-building, the experience of fundraising, the experience of doing presentations, learning to put your point across … brilliant outcomes*').[65] Citizens also learned more about the cost of services. For example, at the March Newburn event there was an audible reaction to hearing that a wheelie bin fire cost £2000. Interestingly, a little knowledge prompted more questions, for example, asking whether that included wages they were already paying, or if it was entirely additional money

[60] Participant observation record: Grand Voting Event, Newburn ward, 21/03/2009.
[61] Interview 14, ward councillor, Newburn, 17/11/2008.
[62] Interview 32, community development worker, Newcastle Council, 27/03/2009.
[63] Interview 19i, participant, Grand Voting Event, Denton ward, 29/11/2008.
[64] Interview 30, group interview, Denton working group members, 26/03/2009.
[65] Interview 32, community development worker, Newcastle Council, 27/03/2009.

(the implication being that more opportunities for deliberation could enhance learning further).[66] Evidence of increased confidence to participate came across particularly strongly, as a member of the Newburn working group exemplifies:

> '*It's a learning process for somebody like me … to hear everybody's point of view, and give your point of view as well. So, as the weeks have gone by and the months have gone by, and just to hear people talk and discuss, it was a learning process … for the last month or two I've been <u>really</u> in, and been able to put things forwards as well*.'[67]

As this quote makes clear, the deliberative elements of the process actively supported civic learning. While this was most noticeable in the working group setting (which was undoubtedly where the most meaningful deliberative experiences occurred), the introduction of even a few minutes discussion at the March events was widely felt to support learning, and so improve decision-making.[68] Seemingly, the experience of a more egalitarian democratic process not only encourages democratic engagement, but resources it too.

Democratic learning was not, of course, wholly confined to citizens. The Social Policy team described how the views of officers and councillors could change: '*there's been a big increase in the numbers of people inclined to support PB [which] doesn't come through evaluation, or through strong political edicts; the more powerful stuff is about storytelling, experiencing it*.'[69] Thus, one 'resistant' councillor moved from maintaining that she was an 'observer' to actively supporting citizen engagement.[70] Similarly, a community development officer, who had always been positive about the community development outcomes, described the evolution of her views on U-Decide's democratic potential:

> '*I couldn't see how that process, which was about funny money being spent on community projects, could translate to mainstream funding, and it took me a long time to see how that might happen. But now I can*.'[71]

[66] Participant observation record: Grand Voting Event, Newburn ward, 21/03/2009.
[67] Interview 12ix, working group member, Grand Voting Event, Newburn ward, 15/11/2008.
[68] Participant observation record: Newcastle Council U-Decide evaluation workshop, 30/04/2009.
[69] Interview 34, group interview, council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 15/7/2009.
[70] Interview 21, council officer, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 03/12/2008.
[71] Interview 32, community development worker, Newcastle Council, 27/03/2009.

There was also evidence of officers learning how to make the process more meaningfully democratic. This occurred particularly in response to problems, such as issues with accountability in Denton (as one council officer described: '*I love the fact that we increase our learning all the time … things happen that aren't easy, but then that makes us better, because we address that and we try and redesign the process*').[72] Likewise, a Denton councillor realised that if citizens were being asked to make decisions, they needed better access to information, and asked the police to share the maps showing anti-social behaviour hotspots with citizens.[73] Of course, the council could share this information at any time; what is significant is that sharing power prompts it to happen.

However, for some Denton working group members who had heard directly about Porto Alegre, the experience was tempered with disappointment that there hadn't been more learning opportunities:

> '*At the beginning, to be quite honest, I thought it was wonderful, because this is the way it was put over to us, that people would be learning to budget, would be interested in finance … but somehow or other, that part just hasn't come*.'[74]

Evidently, revitalising the democratic experience is a journey, and improvements can be made as limitations are identified. This is illustrated by the addition of a deliberative element between the two rounds. However, in the context of a deeply entrenched elitist model of democracy, there are also, of course, ideological impediments to building a genuinely transformative democratic process. Understanding the underlying tensions between the two democratic narratives can help explain the ways in which limits to civic learning are all too easily designed in (and incidentally, how some of the state responses to problems are shaped by that tension). In the following chapter, I examine how these dynamics were manifested in the case of U-Decide, but first I will reflect on what the evidence reveals about the location of sovereignty within the programme.

[72] Interview 16, joint interview, council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 27/11/2008.
[73] Interview 24, ward councillor, Denton, 27/01/2009.
[74] Interview 30, group interview, Denton working group members, 26/03/2009.

WHO DECIDES IN U-DECIDE?

The quality of democratic learning suggests that U-Decide offers citizens a meaningful experience of sovereignty. This was explicitly understood by councillors, the official holders of sovereignty within a representative system:

> '*As councillors, we felt that it was for the public, by the public … therefore we took a back seat. We agreed in principle to take a back seat*.'[75]

> '*You can't say to the community, we're giving you a free rein, and then suddenly decide, no, on this occasion, we want to do this … I didn't want to pay lip service to it. I wanted it to be a community-led project*.'[76]

Thus, for one Denton councillor, handing decision-making control to citizens meant respecting decisions made within the process. He outlined what happened when a community group contacted him after the November voting event to ask for additional money:

> '*A few days later I got a phone call – "We need £800 pound" … I said, "Oh, hold on, you've just got a thousand pound, from U-Decide". "Well, that's what we're ringing up for. We want to know if you'll give us £800, because we only bid a thousand pound, because we knew we wouldn't get it if it was £1,800. I said, "No, sorry, that's part of the whole…" If they'd come to the ward committee afterwards, if they didn't take part in U-Decide, we'd have helped them the best we could, but they cannot go there and say a thousand pound, it's going to cost a thousand pound to run this, when it's actually going to cost £1,800*.'[77]

The working groups also felt citizen sovereignty was the heart of U-Decide:

> '*I mean if we involve councillors, it takes away the actual PB, the participatory budgeting, because we are participating in it, not the councillors. Not even [the officers] are. It's left to the tenants and the community to participate in how the budget's spent. We are the ones that make the decisions*.'[78]

[75] Interview 14, ward councillor, Newburn, 17/11/2008.
[76] Interview 13, ward councillor, Newburn, 17/11/2008.
[77] Interview 24, ward councillor, Denton, 27/01/2009.
[78] Interview 30, group interview, Denton working group members, 26/03/2009.

> '*The community decided, not the officials, yes, the councillors had a vote on the day, the same as the U-Decide committee had, but they didn't make the final decision*.'[79]

The felt reality of this is illustrated by the 'practices of citizenship' described above. A member of Newburn working group explained the experience of sovereignty in this way:

> '*I think it makes you a bit more responsible, it makes you stand up and take a bit more responsibility for your area. And sort of think, well, what can <u>we</u> be doing?*'[80]

There were some notable exceptions to this practice of citizenship, in the sense of assuming responsibility for and within the decision-making space. Tellingly, I only observed this in the case of the more experienced 'community reps' on the Denton working group. Typically, these working group members would combine forthright verbal insistence on citizen control of the process with a high degree of criticism towards the council if problems arose.

The most dramatic instance of this occurred at a sifting day in Denton, when a working group vote went decisively against the most vocal member of the group. This member announced loudly to the councillor present that '*this is on <u>your</u> head, Chair; if this is challenged, you personally are responsible,*' with the result that he immediately insisted the vote had been illegitimate, and over-rode the decision.[81] This illustrates how the picture is a little more complicated than the state simply exercising sovereignty against the wishes of citizens.

There was a strong response from other working group members and council officers, with 'behind the scenes' arguing over the authority for the final decision ('*there's been hell on*', as one officer later put it).[82] While some working group members were, as one described, '*disgusted*' by what had happened,[83] officers tended to presume that they were challenging a working group decision, rather than a councillor's decision. As a result, officers' efforts to reinstate what was in fact a majority citizen decision further worsened relationships between officers

[79] Interview 17, working group member, Newburn ward, 28/11/2008.
[80] Interview 31, joint interview, working group members, Newburn ward, 26/03/2009.
[81] Participant observation record: sifting day, Denton ward, 12/03/2009.
[82] Participant observation record: 18/03/2009.
[83] Interview 28, working group member, Denton ward, 20/03/2009.

and the working group, and perceptions around sovereignty and power. In other words, both officers and citizens believed they were witnessing members of the other group using power in an unaccountable and undemocratic manner.

Compromises over sovereignty were also apparent in the felt need to financially support 'disappointed' applicants. In some cases, this meant simply allocating the remaining ward funds to those projects, as one area coordinator described:

> '*Fortunately, we had 3 failures, three unsuccessful [projects], and they came to ward committee, were funded from the ward committee, so everybody was a winner at the end of the day*.'[84]

Not only does this effectively remove space for genuine dilemmas over scarce resources, but it had an ongoing effect on the exercise of citizen sovereignty. Consequently, a Newburn councillor explained that the ward committee couldn't commit to running a U-Decide process with ward funds the following year, because financing the unsuccessful projects had made an underspend unlikely (this was the source of the funds for the 2008 process).[85]

This brings us to the limits of citizen sovereignty within the U-Decide programme, which is that while citizens are effectively sovereign within the process, they are not sovereign over it. A growing awareness of this clearly prompted some of the 'democratic discussions' I described above, as this working group member explains:

> '*The way we stand at the moment, under the present financial situation, [they] can pull the plug on us any time. They can say well, we're having no more U-Decide now … it's that simple. We're asking for security*.'[86]

The location of sovereignty over the programme was clear. As relations deteriorated with some members of the working group in Denton, a decision was made (informally, and in agreement with local councillors, but unbeknownst to the working group) that U-Decide would not happen in Denton again, because the working group were seen as unwilling to develop the process.[87]

[84] Interview 18, joint interview, area coordinators, 28/11/2008.
[85] Interview 14, ward councillor, Newburn, 17/11/2008.
[86] Interview 30, group interview, Denton working group members, 26/03/2009.
[87] Participant observation record: informal interview, Social Policy Unit, 02/03/2009.

This example illustrates the limits to sovereignty dramatically, through control of access to the decision-making space.[88] However, the same sense of state ownership of the process appeared to affect sovereignty within the decision-making space as well. For example, a working group member observed that:

> '*Once the voting day is finished, we don't hear anything else. We never see the accounts. … I would like to see where all the money went and how much it cost. Real costings*.'[89]

Similarly, officers evidently felt able to make decisions about the nature of the process, as they worked to make it more meaningfully democratic for voting day participants. Thus, the deliberative element of the voting process came as a surprise to the working groups, who felt '*it should have been discussed*.'[90] While citizen views were generally positive (after the event) about how it had worked, it was noticeable that the Social Policy team appeared to consult rather than engage in dialogue with working group members over it, ending a conversation about it with the statement that '*this will be a new feature in the voting from now on*.'[91] Furthermore, two evaluations were held for each voting event, one with working group members, one for officers only. Significantly, a discussion as to whether membership of the working groups should be time-limited was held at the officer-only evaluation of the Denton process.[92]

Finally, there is an issue about what citizens are sovereign over. As I have said, U-Decide in Newcastle operated as a discrete space, which was essentially disconnected from wider decision-making and core funds. Thus, while it was evident that many PB advocates in Newcastle did want this to be a stage on the journey towards more fundamental decisions, in practice the scope of decision-making referred to, as one area coordinator put it, '*luxury items in a hamper as opposed to necessities*.'[93] In the following chapter, I examine different actors' views on what 'mainstreaming' PB might look like, and reflect on the underlying democratic values they reveal.

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[88] This case also illustrates the central role the working group played in officers' and councillors' understanding of the process. Issues with the working group led to the suspension of U-Decide for *all* Denton citizens. I explore the roots of this significant dynamic in the following chapter.
[89] Interview 30, group interview, Denton working group members, 26/03/2009.
[90] Interview 30, group interview, Denton working group members, 26/03/2009.
[91] Participant observation record: Newcastle Council U-Decide evaluation workshop, 30/04/2009.
[92] Participant observation record: officer evaluation meeting, Denton, 03/12/2008.
[93] Interview 18, joint interview, area coordinators, 28/11/2008.

CONCLUSION

Newcastle's U-decide programme provides strong evidence that the experience of a more egalitarian democratic process can act as a 'school for citizenship', despite the constraints of the UK context. Importantly, this supports the heartening conclusion that, as Baiocchi *et al* (2011) have suggested, PB does offer the potential to improve the democratic experience in a wide variety of political contexts; 'ideal' preconditions for empowerment are not required.

While it is clear that effecting a genuine shift in sovereignty is a demanding task in the UK context, even comparatively limited opportunities to practice a more sovereign form of citizenship can be transformative. This is centrally relevant to understanding the nature of the democratic deficit in the UK. Evidence from the U-Decide programme suggests that such experiences offer genuine opportunities for building a more 'mobilised citizenry capable of both cooperation and challenge'. This indicates that there is a strong value to creating more egalitarian decision-making spaces where possible, however constrained.

While such processes (and consequently their outcomes) are very small scale, what matters is that they suggest possibilities. 'Demand-side' theories of the democratic deficit imply that engagement of this nature is difficult to create. The evidence presented here suggests that, on the contrary, alternative experiences of democracy do possess the potential to generate alternative outcomes.

Nonetheless, it is also evident from the U-Decide case that such spaces are subject to, shaped, and ultimately constrained by ideological tensions over the nature of democracy. Thus, reviewing democratic outcomes has raised questions of accountability, citizen rights to participation, sources of democratic legitimacy and the nature of political will. In the next chapter, I explore these questions, and examine the ways in which citizen experiences of U-Decide was influenced by the struggle between competing democratic narratives.

CHAPTER 8

DEMOCRATIC ASSUMPTIONS AND VALUES IN NEWCASTLE

The U-Decide programme in Newcastle was actively championed by citizens, councillors and public officers; this breadth of support facilitated the creation of a genuinely different decision-making space within the representative system. However, while PB allows alternative democratic values to be expressed, participants and organisers do not, of course, start with a blank sheet. Democratic innovations are a site of struggle not only because of the competing agendas of different actors, but also because there are tensions between our acquired understandings of democracy and counter-cultural democratic values. This raises the important question of precisely what it is that different actors aim to achieve when they support PB.[1]

To illustrate, a 1989 Brazilian survey (in the very early years of the fledgling democracy) found that 42% of respondents said that democracy was always better, 40% said either that dictatorship was better or that it made no difference, but between 71% and 86%[2] said that the country would be better 'if the people had the power to decide' (Abers, 2000:53). This illustrates the ubiquity of conflating democracy with a limited structure associated with professional politicians – and the limitations of reading a lack of interest in 'democracy' as a lack of interest in collectively exercising sovereignty. As a Scarborough PB supporter and community activist from put it: '*oh, I've no time for democracy; I just want my community to have a say about the decisions that affect us*.'[3]

The purpose of this chapter is to consider how these underlying values enhance or limit the potential for the kind of democratic outcomes discussed in the previous chapter, and reflect on the implications this has for creating a more egalitarian decision-making experience in the UK context. I aim to identify the threads of our two competing narratives, and examine the struggles for democratic meaning which lie behind the development of the U-Decide programme. Accordingly, I explore different actors' motivations for initiating,

[1] Likewise, in chapter 5, I noted that PB has attracted interest from a wide variety of individuals and organisations embodying a variety of political viewpoints, and hence an equally wide variety of aims.
[2] The variation depended on the age of the respondent.
[3] Participant observation record: informal interview, Scarborough, 17/06/2010.

supporting or participating in U-Decide, alongside associated conceptions of human nature, representation and the state (as revealed through practice).

This enables me to address two key questions. Firstly, the analysis I have presented so far suggests that an important aspect of the deficit may lie in the discrepancy between the nature of what is on offer as democratic engagement, and the kind of democracy that could inspire wider engagement. Through a review of democratic values expressed by citizens engaged with U-Decide, I consider whether the egalitarian model of democracy represented by PB accords more closely with citizens' democratic values. Secondly, I consider the extent to which advocates of PB within the representative state are *in practice* engaged in an attempt to subvert the dominant context towards a more egalitarian model (reflecting on what their assumptions and actions reveal about their understanding of sovereignty). In this respect, the evidence suggests that while PB advocates engage positively with egalitarian democratic values, they operate in a context characterised by what I call 'representative habits of mind'. This matters because it can affect the extent to which democratic activists succeed in enacting a different vision of democracy.

I will begin with an overview of citizen assumptions and democratic values, as expressed through their participation in U-Decide.

CITIZEN-DEMOCRATS

When asked why they attended the Grand Voting Events, or the reasons they thought U-Decide was a good idea, participating citizens typically responded in terms of basic democratic values, as the following quotes illustrate:

> '*I like this basic democracy thing … and I think this is brilliant.*'[4]
>
> *'You know, it's local democracy in action, really. It's excellent.*'[5]
>
> '*It's better this way because everyone gets their own input and opinion on how they would like the money spent*.'[6]

At the November events, 96% of participants, when asked, agreed that this was a good way to spend public money.[7] Importantly, this was frequently connected

[4] Interview 19vi, Grand Voting Event, Denton ward, 29/11/2008.
[5] Interview 12vii, Grand Voting Event, Newburn ward, 15/11/2008.
[6] Interview 19iii, Grand Voting Event, Denton ward, 29/11/2008

by participants to changed outcomes and improved facilities as a result of better democratic decision-making,[8] as summed up by a Newburn youth group:

> '*It's better doing it this way, cos then your public's voting, what the public want and that. It makes everyone happy, instead of people moaning.*'[9]

Citizens were also centrally involved in process planning, via the working groups. Here, there was a much greater degree of time-commitment, and a correspondingly greater depth of reflection. However, the primary motivating factors remained changed outcomes for their neighbourhoods and communities, and direct, binding involvement in decision-making (control over resources).

Working group members understood changed outcomes to result from two causes. Firstly, some working group members emphasised the additional funds that the process brought into the ward (an aspect given a high profile by Newburn councillors in particular). They expressed this in social justice terms, relating to their perception of their neighbourhoods' historically unmet needs:

> '*We've always said we never get nowt. That's the cry. We get nowt. We don't come under the classification for deprivation, although we do have deprivation in the ward. We have high elderly people, we've got high sickness rates, all that. But no, we don't fit into the deprivation lists*.'[10]

However, going beyond the added resources, the degree to which changed outcomes were linked to greater democratic control was striking. As the views described in the last chapter indicate, the over-riding message was that citizen engagement in decision-making is felt to be worthwhile *because* it leads to different (and, in their view, more socially just) outcomes. This was explicitly rooted in support for a shift of sovereignty; U-Decide was valued because it '*takes power away from the big people*'.[11]

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[7] Participant observation record: Grand Voting Event, Newburn ward, 15/11/08 & Grand Voting Event, Denton ward, 29/11/08. At the March events, participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed, from 1-5, rather than answering yes or no. The range of responses weren't made public, only the average score: 4.64 in Newburn, 4.42 in Denton.
[8] This is echoed in Kezia Lavan's assessment that the transformatory potential of UK PB processes may be their strongest appeal for participants (Lavan, 2007:34).
[9] Interview 23, youth group, Newburn ward, 26/01/2009.
[10] Interview 26, group interview, Newburn working group members, 16/02/2009.
[11] Interview 26, group interview, Newburn working group members, 16/02/2009.

For some of the more community-oriented working group members in Denton, the description of decision-making in Porto Alegre (given by the PB Unit) had stayed with them as inspiration and reference point:

> '*I think the idea was, when I first heard about it in Brazil, and the way it was happening in Brazil, I thought it was fantastic. Because it works differently over there to what it does here. Because there the money … can go back to the roads and things like that. That's where they started. And we were trying to get our heads round how it would go here*.'[12]

This chimes with the increased democratic appetite and desire for security that I discussed in the previous chapter:

> '*We don't want to be begging for money for this … we want to be part of the ward committee, part of the system. Not a gift. We don't need to go cap in hand. So, the ward has £36,000, we [would] have 25%, oh boy, we've got £9000, what are we going to do with it, what do the people in the Denton ward want done?*'[13]

Significantly, the only contradictory view was expressed by one of the 'experienced reps' in Denton. This working group member, while very antagonistic towards the council and vocal about citizen capacity, did not want to see citizens engaged with '*mainline stuff*'.[14] Arguably, this is a view that accords with the 'cult of expertise' inherent in the existing system, from someone who regarded themselves as very much part of that culture.[15]

Citizen motivations in general therefore reflect an affinity with the idea of democracy as participatory and inclusive rather than elitist. This is reinforced by citizen views of their communities' capacity to be involved in decision-making. Local knowledge was frequently referenced (alongside its lack within existing decision-making systems). There was also a strong sense of the innate capacity of people to make sensible and prudent decisions. PB was frequently described as an opportunity, not only to take part in decision-making, but to *prove* that the people are capable:

[12] Interview 30, group interview, Denton working group members, 26/03/2009.
[13] Interview 30, group interview, Denton working group members, 26/03/2009.
[14] Interview 33, working group member, Denton ward, 02/04/2009.
[15] This echoes the conclusions of Ganuza *et al* (2014:2277), who have noted that PB can generate a conflict between the old and new protagonists because the former have to share political space.

> '*That's what we need … to prove that the people out here, who may be people on the dole, they may be only householders to the people in the Civic, but we're just as intelligent and probably have done just as good a job in life as they do. And we needed to prove that*.'[16]

Looking back to the American revolutionary debates, this coheres much more with the Anti-Federalist view of the people than the Federalist perspective; citizen participation in decision-making should be facilitated, not contained. It is noteworthy that the idea of citizen capacity which emerged in talking to working group members was clearly about potential, not necessarily proficiency. There was a sense that people have not always had the opportunity to develop skills, and that this needs support. Both voting day participants and working group members referenced a desire to learn about local decision making, finances and spending wisely. Thus, there was a strong sense that we are capable of more than we realise (which was understood to contribute to others' reluctance to get involved). For some, this was based on their own personal journeys:

> '*You tell them and you say, "well, why don't you come?" "Oh, no, not for me." But we never thought anything like that was for us, did we*?'[17]

Similarly, the belief that people possess collective potential was fundamental to citizens' understanding of democratic process, and to the value they saw in PB. The majority of working group members and participants explicitly valued the role of the face-to-face voting events in bringing communities together. While it was clear that any shared community activity would have been welcome, both participants and working group members referred positively to the opportunity for communities to work together, rather than simply being together:

> '*If you want more working together, achievement and a better life for everyone, to actually find ways of doing that together, and you know this is one of those big, big opportunities, to actually come together and forget about all this crap, and you know, you come from here, you come from there, you know, you're rich, you're poor, you're anything, but really work together.*'[18]

[16] Interview 33, working group member, Denton ward, 02/04/2009.
[17] Interview 26, group interview, Newburn working group members, 16/02/2009.
[18] Interview 19vi, Grand Voting Event, Denton ward, 29/11/2008.

This was reflected in some working group members' increasing desire for the process to take a collective rather than individual form, as their experience of participatory democracy grew (described in the last chapter), as well as in debates over practicalities. More people could attend (and vote) if the seating was laid out in rows, but working group members emphasised the importance of the table layout in allowing people to discuss the presentations, demonstrating a practical commitment to deliberation (as one Newburn citizen explained: '*that's what we want, the talking and discussion about it, make people think'*).[19]

Importantly, the commitment to collective process explicitly didn't preclude conflict. Citizens referenced both the possibility of conflict, and its relevance to the need for collective and participatory decision-making:

> '*It's the people that are deciding, the people in the area. They're having a say. I mean, somebody over there might think that's an awful idea, so they've got a say*.'[20]

Commitment to collective action coexisted with a strong thread across the working groups that both the opportunities and inclination for community activity appear to have reduced in recent years, and need support to be rebuilt. A great many working group members focused on the difficulties of involving new and particularly younger people in community action. Interestingly, descriptions of this situation echoed the 'self-fulfilling prophecy' idea that I raised in chapter 4:

> '*We're turning more like the Americans every day*.'[21]

> '*There aren't many communities left nowadays, I don't think. I think a lot of the communities got broken down and I think they need to be, start to be building them back up again*.'[22]

> '*[They'll] give the money. But they'll not give their time. Expect to be paid. It's sad. But it's the way the country's going, isn't it? Do nowt for nowt. And it worries me, cos when we all pop our clogs, god knows what'll happen. We've got to try and encourage the youngsters*.'[23]

[19] Interview 31, joint interview, working group members, Newburn ward, 26/03/2009.
[20] Interview 19iv, Grand Voting Event, Denton ward, 29/11/2008.
[21] Interview 26, group interview, Newburn working group members, 16/02/2009.
[22] Interview 28, working group member, Denton ward, 20/03/2009.
[23] Interview 17, working group member, Newburn ward, 28/11/2008.

As the quotes above illustrate, this was not seen as a fixed aspect of 'human nature'. Indeed, for many, addressing this issue was a significant goal of PB. Working group members clearly understood their fellow citizens to be capable of *being* motivated, even if not currently motivated. Thus, the view of human nature implied by the egalitarian democratic narrative – civically capable and possessing the potential for cooperation and collectivity – chimes with the view expressed through engagement with PB processes.

As we saw in chapter 3, this understanding of human nature gives rise to a view of the state in which citizens are able to contain the government's tendency towards abuse of power, rather than the view associated with more elitist systems, which emphasises the state's role in containing the excesses of the people. Accordingly, the egalitarian democratic state is built on close representative relationships, characterised by trust, two-way communication and responsiveness. The democratic values described above were not presented in a vacuum, but often with direct reference to the existing system:

> '*They talk, you listen, and that's to me the end of it. But this thing has been different; it's been different altogether*.'[24]

> '*It's about people taking control … taking ownership of where they live, and where they belong, and being able to make the decisions, because nobody in the past has ever asked me or any of the people on my estate, what they thought of where they lived*.'[25]

A picture emerges of the state as a distant entity, which does not welcome citizens in, listen or respond. These statements were typical:

> '*If the council is running it, people don't want to know. They mistrust the councillors. People's perceptions are, if it's the council, it's already settled*.'[26]

> '*I sometimes doubt whether I have much say, but never mind … well, if they make decisions here, that's a better idea than somebody sort of sitting in an office … I'm a sceptic, I'm afraid*.'[27]

[24] Interview 12ix, working group member, Grand Voting Event, Newburn ward, 15/11/2008.
[25] Interview 28, working group member, Denton ward, 20/03/2009.
[26] Participant observation record: Newcastle Council U-Decide evaluation workshop, Denton ward, 30/04/2009.

Moreover, if you do want to engage despite the perception that you and your views aren't welcome, state structures are not seen as either easy to understand or negotiate:

> '*[If it wasn't U-Decide] it would go into the mysterious pot, where nobody knows where it goes.*'[28]

Ward committees were described as '*officious*',[29] '*too official*'[30] and poorly attended; the 'usual channels' as '*a bureaucratic set-up that has to be gone through … that seems to take forever*.'[31] This impression was reinforced by many negative descriptions of councillors, as '*professional politicians*' who '*don't know what to say to you*',[32] and who are generally absent unless it's election time. Interestingly, length of service was consistently referred to as a negative ('*in so long that really they'd lost contact with the community*'),[33] an attitude which echoes both the Anti-Federalist and Porto Alegrean desire to restrict terms of office. Lastly, the idea I explored in chapter 4, that the UK system is inherently power-hoarding, would doubtless ring true:

> '*The top and bottom is, do you think they would be eager enough to let us have some of that pot?*'
>
> '*No, when it comes to power, no. You'd need to fight for every minute*.'[34]

Meaningfully engaging people in decision-making is therefore not only understood to be good democracy, but, crucially, *better* democracy. However, despite their critical analysis of the status quo, for most working group members this did not mean citizens replacing existing decision-makers; rather, it meant working together, bringing different and valuable sets of knowledge and experience.[35] Thus, the idea of closer proximity between the state and citizens, integral to PB in Porto Alegre and the wider egalitarian democratic tradition, resonated strongly (as I described in the previous chapter). Accordingly,

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[27] Interview 12viii, working group member, Grand Voting Event, Newburn ward, 15/11/2008.
[28] Interview 30, group interview, Denton working group members, 26/03/2009.
[29] Interview 12x, working group member, Grand Voting Event, Newburn ward, 15/11/2008.
[30] Interview 17, working group member, Newburn ward, 28/11/2008.
[31] Interview 12vii, working group member, Grand Voting Event, Newburn ward, 15/11/2008.
[32] Interview 26, group interview, Newburn working group members, 16/02/2009.
[33] Interview 30, group interview, Denton working group members, 26/03/2009.
[34] Interview 30, group interview, Denton working group members, 26/03/2009.
[35] As I have discussed, there were a very small number of experienced 'community reps' who were more antagonistic towards (and often unwilling to see any good in) the council. However, this was not a typical view.

aspirational views of the representative relationship emphasised councillors who made an effort to get to know people, and who listen:

> '*I think, personally, I've always said anything going on with the government, our local MPs should be coming out and saying well, what do you think of this, and going by what we say. Not just what he thinks. And I think the councillors should be doing that. But it doesn't work that way when you're a councillor [because] you're in a political party*.'[36]

Overall, the values inherent in citizen views and actions (as expressed within U-Decide) accord most consistently with the egalitarian democratic narrative, while views on what they have learned as 'democracy' are more critical. The evidence presented here does not suggest a citizenry which is apathetic, but one whose disengagement is rooted in a recognisable critique of the existing system; a citizenry which is, in fact, deeply receptive to the prospect of better politics and better outcomes.[37]

The last chapter assessed the extent of democratic possibilities offered by PB processes of the type witnessed in Newcastle. In the remainder of this chapter, I relate these opportunities and limits to underlying struggles for democratic meaning within the state itself, in order to ask more precisely *what* democratic values the citizen appetite for more egalitarian democracy meets within the parameters of a process such as U-Decide.

U-DECIDE AS EGALITARIAN DEMOCRACY?

While there were competing narratives at work in the implementation of U-Decide, the main drive for its core advocates (officers and councillors) was clearly in keeping with the egalitarian tradition. Arguably, this is what elicited the response described above. The Social Policy team characterised the three elements of their motivation for the work as follows: '*democratic renewal, community outcomes, and delivery of the projects and ideas themselves … if*

[36] Interview 17, working group member, Newburn ward, 28/11/2008. Interestingly, the tendency of the party system to inhibit the representative relationship (discussed in chapter 4) is explicitly referenced here.

[37] While the evidence I have presented here relates to citizens who have responded to the opportunity for engagement through U-Decide, and therefore cannot be simplistically presumed to hold true for all citizens, it is clear that the egalitarian democratic values inherent in the programme elicited a response from a much greater number of citizens than the alternative opportunities for 'active citizenship' offered within the local representative system. Thus, U-Decide can be said to suggest a more fruitful coherence with citizen democratic values.

you can revitalise democracy then services will become better'.[38] Their democratic motivation was expressed directly, and echoes citizen views:

> '*I think it's the right thing to do. I don't think you can leave big decisions up to a minority … decisions that affect communities, and have the greatest impact on communities, should be made by the community, rather than by somebody who might not have the knowledge that a community has*.'[39]

Many of the councillors who chose to run U-Decide processes in their ward expressed their motivations in equally clear-cut terms:

> '*I believe in community politics, all the way along. I don't see myself as somebody that's elected to the ward and then goes back to the ward and say, "well, times are hard, so we can give you this, we can give you that." I believe that the voice should come from the outside, to the centre*.'[40]

> '*People who are affected by decisions by other bodies should take those decisions, because it affects their quality of life, how they live their lives, their community – they have an absolute right as far as I'm concerned*'.[41]

Furthermore, the officers leading the programme felt the depth of political support for the programme at strategic level was genuine:

> '*You look at some local authorities … you've got to have PB done by 2012 and we'll tick that off – but it's not their mission. I do think that Newcastle can give out more of a mission statement about empowering communities. We're not relying on individuals to support our work*.'[42]

This is illustrated by the coherence between the democratic agenda of the council officers developing the programme and that of the executive. Cllr John Shipley, the Leader of Newcastle Council, listed three motivations which echo those of the Social Policy team:

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[38] Interview 34, group interview, council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 15/7/2009.
[39] Interview 16, joint interview, council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 27/11/2008.
[40] Interview 14, ward councillor, Newburn, 17/11/2008.
[41] Interview 25, ward councillor (and former Leader of the Council), Denton, 28/01/2009.
[42] Interview 16, joint interview, council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 27/11/2008. This contrasts strikingly with Bradford, as one officer mentioned: '*I feel lucky … because you look at Bradford; you wouldn't want to work there, would you? It's just horrendous.*'

> '*One is to engage with residents directly … so that the councillors are not seen to be aloof and away, separate, but actually as part and parcel of their neighbourhoods and communities. Secondly, it's to get better decision-making as well … it is much better if you engage more people in making decisions about what are priorities. The third reason is that it gives a focus for neighbourhoods themselves, for residents in those neighbourhoods to come together to meet each other and to discuss their priorities … a structure that enables the people to come together is also very helpful in the building of sustainability within neighbourhoods*.'[43]

These motivations are underpinned by an unmistakable belief in citizen capacity and collective potential. Core U-Decide advocates repeatedly spoke of their confidence in citizens' decision-making skills (specifically the ability to budget, and to empathise with and consider the needs of others),[44] and willingness to engage, provided they '*know it will make a difference to their community*'.[45] Similarly, as for citizens, the collective nature of the process was understood to be essential: '*seeing people grow within these events, from being silent, to being "this is what I want for my community*."'[46] Thinking collectively was understood to come through acting collectively: '*a sense of collective endeavour – rather than that of an individual organisation … it breaks down the barriers*.'[47]

The faith in citizen capacity was underlined by an extensive commitment to supporting citizen learning, as summed up by a Denton councillor:

> '*My view is, if the people of Brazil, with all the difficulties they have in Brazil, can cope with this process, why on earth can't the people of Newcastle cope with it? … The challenge for the city council and the councillors and the officers would be an increase in communication. People can only make sensible – well they can make decisions even if they don't have the best information – but the challenge for the City Council would be to say, right, we've got to look at how we communicate*

[43] Interview 22, Cllr John Shipley, Leader, Newcastle Council, 26/1/2009.
[44] Participant observation record: working group evaluation meeting, Denton ward, 02/12/2008; interview 16, joint interview, council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 27/11/2008.
[45] Interview 16, joint interview, council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 27/11/2008.
[46] Interview 16, joint interview, council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 27/11/2008.
[47] Interview 14, ward councillor, Newburn, 17/11/2008.

with residents, let them know what is happening, why it's happening, how much it costs, where the money's coming from, and what other options there are for the money. There is still a large perception among members of the public that the council can do whatever it likes, that the council is omnipotent, and that it has a bottomless pit of cash … My experience has been, once people understand the process, they're much more realistic about what can be done and what can't be done.'[48]

Accordingly, opportunities for officers to share information about legal and financial parameters of decision-making were built into the process, for example ensuring that voting participants understood the source of the money and the reasons why particular suggestions weren't eligible.[49] Importantly, there was a widespread belief that increased skills and understanding would facilitate an increased will and ability to make bigger decisions:

'*It spreads up, doesn't it? if you're making smaller decisions about smaller pots of money that are based in your experience of services and your environment, and then you scale that up to a commissioning model that's maybe about more strategic decisions, but you can recognise a thread there between what you've been doing on your Saturday, at this big event, and voting, and then these bigger decisions*.'[50]

This illustrates the fact that U-Decide organisers embraced the egalitarian democratic goal of a closer relationship between citizens and the state. One council officer articulated this powerfully:

'*Is this our core business? Hell, yes! … We <u>should</u> be about making great relationships with our community. It is core business. In the early days, that expression 'value for money' used to really piss me off. Because, if you weren't doing this, what would you be doing?*'[51]

Thus, there was an egalitarian motivation across officers and councillors directly involved in supporting U-Decide, which was relatively coherent with the views

[48] Interview 25, ward councillor (and former Leader of the Council), Denton, 28/01/2009.
[49] Participant observation record: officer evaluation meeting, Denton, 03/12/2008; interview 14, ward councillor, Newburn, 17/11/2008.
[50] Interview 16, joint interview, council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 27/11/2008.
[51] Interview 16, joint interview, council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 27/11/2008.

expressed by citizens. As I outlined above, for citizens this was closely connected to a critique of the outcomes of the existing system (as in Porto Alegre). However, for officers and councillors, attitudes to the status quo appeared to be a little more varied.

For officers supporting PB as a core element of their role, the commitment to a different form of democracy was absolutely rooted in a critique of the status quo. However, importantly, this tended to be a critique of the existing democratic *process*, rather than its outcomes. Thus, officers described seeing councillors '*take decisions without reference to wider needs, decisions that wouldn't arise in an open public meeting and wouldn't get supported even if it came up*.'[52] There was a particular concern over the extent of power wielded by officers rather than councillors, which officers advocating PB saw as undemocratic (though they also recognised that this relative powerlessness could make councillors protective of what power they have left).[53] These officers recognised the extent of citizen lack of faith in the council as both reasonable and democratically problematic, and aimed to address this practically:

> '*They were so impressed that they got a letter from us really quickly, and we said we were going to be somewhere and we were there. She was absolutely shocked, and I was like, well, there you go, it's not difficult*.'[54]

However, the specific nature of this systemic critique has one very significant implication. As I have said, U-Decide existed as a discrete space which was not structurally connected to wider decision-making mechanisms. Arguably, the absence of an explicit outcomes-based critique (in other words, a weak social justice motivation) made it easier for state actors to maintain a (comfortable) focus on the new, improved (but separate) space as complementary to unchanged control over existing resources, instead of being clearly understood as modelling a proposed alternative.

This appeared to facilitate an emphasis on community development through U-Decide as an end in itself, rather than as a route to changed outcomes:

[52] Interview 34, group interview, council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 15/7/2009.
[53] Participant observation record: informal interview, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 16/10/2008.
[54] Interview 21, council officer, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 03/12/2008.

> '*To me the spin-offs are almost more important than the motivation for doing it. And this thing about looking at ways to ensure that our communities are cohesive is much bigger to me, than what we do. It's a process, which spends public money, but which brings communities together, and you know when you see those spin-offs … like people saying "I look around my community, and I voted for that, and I voted for that," that's massive, and when you get in a room together, and a group of scouts will go along and do something with a group of older people … properly bringing communities together so that they know one another, they empathise with each other's cause – it binds communities*.'[55]

Similarly, beyond the discrete arena of PB, a weakened social justice motivation can act as an impetus towards 'demand-side' solutions to the democratic deficit (despite a 'supply-side' critique). Thus, without an explicit goal of changing the mainstream system itself, the hopes for broader political change can tend towards a focus on citizen engagement, rather than state behaviour:

> '*I think it's about seeing the value of PB as both a community development tool and a way of really increasing the involvement of people in the democratic process*.'[56]

> '*It's giving people the power, seeing the buzz, the buzz of touching people that don't normally engage with the council, and that's what I love more than anything*.'[57]

> '*I think we give people a set of skills, by taking part in it, and a little peek of what budgeting is about, and then if they wish, they can go on to bigger things, making bigger decisions, and quite often people who aren't active in their communities, which is the lion's share of people at the starting point, as a result of that, become active citizens, and then can take control of the bigger thing … we should be about empowering our residents to make sure that they can have a relationship with us*.'[58]

[55] Interview 16, joint interview, council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 27/11/2008.
[56] Interview 32, community development worker, Newcastle Council, 27/03/2009.
[57] Interview 21, council officer, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 03/12/2008.
[58] Interview 16, joint interview, council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 27/11/2008.

While citizens valued democratic learning and community development outcomes too, this is a very different emphasis to a primary focus on changed outcomes (note the orientation of empowering residents to have a relationship with the council, rather than vice versa).

As is evident from the views of citizens, this dynamic did not compromise the experience of U-Decide itself – as an *extra-systemic* empowering democratic experience. It is important to be clear. U-Decide unambiguously represents a distinctive and more egalitarian decision-making space, the inherent values of which evidently cohere strongly with citizen democratic values, and which in itself can offer valuable democratic learning outcomes, as the previous chapter described. Nonetheless, as a separate space to the existing system, it does not necessarily offer a challenge to existing decision-making mechanisms. I suggest that this has implications for the programme's broader development, and therefore its potential impact on wider decision-making processes (and accordingly, on its utility as a response to the democratic deficit).

This is not, however, to imply that the Social Policy team were lacking in broader democratic ambition. On the contrary, the views of organisers reflected the increased citizen appetite for democratic engagement:

> '*Small decisions will wear thin … people realise there are bigger decisions to make and they would like to get involved*.'[59]

For them, U-Decide ultimately had to be '*about reshaping how existing budgets are delivered*,'[60] not least because '*it isn't sustainable to go on spending money that doesn't exist in someone's budget*'.[61]

My point is rather that the discrete nature of the U-Decide programme, without a clearly articulated critique of the existing system as failing to deliver, arguably restricted its potential impact. While U-Decide organisers (and committed advocates amongst their wider colleagues) were very aware of sceptical attitudes towards the programme, tackling this was frequently approached through the desire to demonstrate citizen capacity (as here: '*there's still an element of people, a lot of people out there that think the council knows best;*

[59] Interview 34, group interview, council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 15/7/2009.
[60] Interview 21, council officer, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 03/12/2008.
[61] Participant observation record: informal interview, Social Policy Unit, 27/01/2009.

we're the experts … and they don't see, you know, the quality of decision-making here can be really, really good'),[62] rather than through challenging the state's assumptions (arguably, complacency) about the existing system. In other words, organisers recognised that U-Decide offered an intrinsic challenge to the professional identity of some officers,[63] but they did not articulate it as an overt challenge to the democratic legitimacy of the system as a whole.

This meant that it was possible for a wider circle of council officers in Newcastle to fully support U-Decide as a 'demand-side' solution to the democratic deficit, despite not sharing a fundamental, egalitarian critique of the existing system. This included officers whose engagement would be vital for the mainstream development of U-Decide, for example, area coordinators. Thus, active support could combine with an equally firm defence of representative democracy (which entailed clearly articulated limits to the development of the programme):

> '*We want people to be engaged, participate, be involved in decision-making processes, the democratic process. It's absolutely everything that our jobs are about, so absolutely we do. It's really good when you see people being, you know, from an idea, going all the way through the process, looking at the pot of money. Really, that's what you want for the wider public, isn't it? For everyone to have a good grasp on budgets, budget controls, priorities, for the city, and all the rest of it. It fits perfectly. I like it, it's great … [but] then you go back to that old argument of the Council saying "well look, I was voted in, and my mandate is to do that," and if that's what we encourage, do we start encouraging a disaffected local politician who's spent time canvassing, and everything else, up to a proper, a fully democratic election, and then suddenly that power is taken away because we're introducing a PB process, and then local people decide what their priorities are as opposed to… what PB can't do; it cannot replace the decision-making or the support by a local politician*.'[64]

This dynamic was echoed, albeit in a somewhat different way, by the (elected) executive supporters of the programme. As I have said, their commitment to the programme was not in doubt. The Leader, Cllr Shipley, was unequivocal: '*you*

[62] Interview 32, community development worker, Newcastle Council, 27/03/2009.
[63] Interview 34, group interview, council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 15/7/2009.
[64] Interview 18, joint interview, area coordinators, 28/11/2008.

can't do everything out of this Civic Centre; it's not possible – you end up with poorer decisions.'[65] U-Decide was intended to encourage a more inclusive political approach, with the explicit aim of addressing the democratic deficit, as the Cllr Shipley explains:

> '*The push has come from us but I think it just reflects a general awareness of all politicians that voting is going down in elections; younger people aren't engaging in the same way. Maybe this concept of, you know, the ballot box and that's your involvement, you go and vote and that's it, that actually, you just have to have a whole set of other ways in which people personally can engage at an individual level, and I think that's what one of the things U-Decide is about*.'[66]

However, the underlying systemic critique at strategic level was not a critique of representative democracy as such, but rather, of the extent to which the system operates as a technocracy rather than a democracy:

> '*Most of these decisions are actually being made by officers, anyway, so it doesn't impact upon councillors – it's one of the little understood facts of local government, some 97% of all decisions are being made by officers on delegated powers and much of the U-Decide money that was being disbursed actually would never have got as far as a ward committee, it would have come through different bits of the council, so what U-Decide does is it takes funds of money, wraps them up from several directorates and produces a pot, and I find that very welcome as an approach*.'[67]

Thus, U-Decide is meant to foster a culture shift for officers as opposed to an overhaul of the system, as the administration's first Leader describes:

> '*By and large, the City Council gets it right most of the time, first time, but at the periphery, where it matters most, in the communities, it tends to get it wrong every time, and doesn't seem to learn, mainly because a lot of officers are not used to talking and dealing with the public. They don't know how to do that, and they regard it as an ordeal to have to come to*

[65] Interview 22, Cllr John Shipley, Leader, Newcastle Council, 26/1/2009.
[66] Interview 22, Cllr John Shipley, Leader, Newcastle Council, 26/1/2009.
[67] Interview 22, Cllr John Shipley, Leader, Newcastle Council, 26/1/2009.

ward committees and explain what's happening in a particular process … a lot of officers working for the authority and for public bodies like the police, like all sorts of other bodies, are not used to coming and explaining; they're used to making decisions.'[68]

The implication here is that the system produces generally good decisions, but is markedly less good at communicating with citizens about them. Thus, the administration was distinctly less critical of elected members (Cllr Shipley was '*not sure that it will do anything much in terms of building stronger relationships with local councillors than already exists because they're already quite strong now within wards*').[69] Executive members were instead keen to articulate how U-Decide supports the position of ward councillors, and explicitly, how it supports representative democracy itself:

'*There is a direct connection between the councillor elected through a ballot box and the residents who elected that councillor, so I see a contract, you see, between those – I think I have a contract with the electorate as a whole who elected me, not just the people who voted for me, because some didn't, but there's a contract – and one of the ways that you deliver that contract, is by having a local structure within your ward whereby people can continue to engage with you*.'[70]

In this view, participatory structures both support councillors in being better informed, and help citizens develop democratic skills (which councillors are understood to already have):

'Councillors are pretty good at [decision-making], actually, because they have a whole ward view, whereas you often find that people within a smaller area have only their smaller neighbourhood view – but then this all would enable more people to get together to understand.'[71]

Representative democracy continues to be seen as the ideal form of democratic expression. An important goal for U-Decide was therefore to resource more traditional engagement:

[68] Interview 25, ward councillor (and former Leader of the Council), Denton, 28/01/2009.
[69] Interview 22, Cllr John Shipley, Leader, Newcastle Council, 26/1/2009.
[70] Interview 22, Cllr John Shipley, Leader, Newcastle Council, 26/1/2009.
[71] Interview 22, Cllr John Shipley, Leader, Newcastle Council, 26/1/2009.

'*How do you organise elections that are meaningful, when people don't know each other well? Parish councils often have problems filling their total number; they often don't have enough candidates to stand in an election. Well, the more you have structures like this, the more people get to know each other, and the more elections you have*.'[72]

This is not to suggest that the changes Newcastle Council aimed to make were minor. Their approach entailed a genuine challenge to both officers and councillors, as they recognised:

'*They are used to a situation where the councillors decide, sitting with the officers, what gets done where, and this is a different approach … some councillors think, well, just a minute, first of all, we have to share influence with these unelected people on the LSP, and now you're expecting us to share our influence locally, through participatory budgeting and so on. But actually the ones who've got any sense at all will see it as absolutely part and parcel of what they are supposed to do as local councillors, recognising local priorities, and bringing together the resources that are available and the council partners, agencies, to deliver them, and to maximise the opportunities for people to influence not just the priorities but how those priorities are met.*'[73]

Critically, the executive needed to convince councillors of the value of the approach, because (as the last chapter demonstrated) control remains in the hands of the councillors. PB is presented as a tool, '*a very liberating tool, an empowering tool*,' which councillors are encouraged to use. To be clear, the executive were powerfully in favour of councillors using PB, out of a manifestly genuine commitment to more inclusive decision-making, but they stopped short of requiring councillors to use it. Cllr Faulkner, Deputy Leader and executive member overseeing the programme, explains:

'*We're trying to encourage reasonable flexibility. So you get your money … if you want to put the money to one side to spend a bigger amount next year, you can – you know, within reason. And if you want to spend the money, or a chunk of it, on PB initiatives, you can. If you want to*

[72] Interview 22, Cllr John Shipley, Leader, Newcastle Council, 26/1/2009.
[73] Interview 27, Cllr David Faulkner, Deputy Leader, Newcastle Council, 02/03/2009.

spend the money in the usual way, you can. But my guess is that PB will increasingly be used by wards to determine that expenditure.'[74]

U-Decide was presented as part of a core localism agenda (the desire to increase control over resources at ward level). In this vein, it was envisaged as an important option on each ward's menu of engagement choices (accordingly, '*it should be written into role descriptions for councillors to maximise opportunities for the community to be empowered, including, as an example, PB*'),[75] rather than a model for spending mainstream resources, as the Social Policy team envisaged. To the extent that the executive considered a more embedded transformation of decision-making, this was representative in form:

'*The elephant in the room is, would we ever change the fact that the councillors make the decisions, and my answer is yes, my answer is that I could see in three to five years' time a whole different pattern across the council. In my ward, where there are 5 neighbourhoods, I, if people wanted it, I could see some kind of neighbourhood council, or community council, with elected reps, in one or more parts of the ward if they wanted it. And I could see that some might be more up for it than others*.'[76]

The executive's plans for the future of U-Decide, while reflecting a desire to embed PB, stopped short of a transfer of sovereignty. This illustrates how (and explains why) U-Decide failed to meaningfully combine representative and participatory democracy, despite a high level of political will – to put it in terms of the favourable context features identified in the comparative PB literature, how and why political will did not translate into fiscal and operational autonomy. In view of the executive's fundamental commitment to representative democracy, this apparent contradiction makes sense, and provides a context for the limited transfer of sovereignty referred to in the previous chapter.

Before considering how these views on sovereignty were enacted in practice, I will briefly contrast the executive's position with the systemic critique expressed by some ward councillors. Interestingly, this emerged as much more forthright and comprehensive than that of either officer PB advocates, or their own political leadership.

[74] Interview 27, Cllr David Faulkner, Deputy Leader, Newcastle Council, 02/03/2009.
[75] Interview 27, Cllr David Faulkner, Deputy Leader, Newcastle Council, 02/03/2009.
[76] Interview 27, Cllr David Faulkner, Deputy Leader, Newcastle Council, 02/03/2009.

My focus here is specifically on non-careerist local councillors, who are rooted in their communities and who came to formal politics through a personal history of activism (for example, struggles to improve their neighbourhoods, or trade unionism). Their stories suggest that they were frustrated with the outcomes that the system produced for their communities, and they wanted to make a difference (a social justice motivation, essentially). The public narrative of democracy suggests that power is held by politicians, and if the outcomes are wrong, then we must have elected the wrong politicians. As I discussed in chapter 4, this is the system's 'myth of accountability' – if the politicians don't deliver what the people want, then the people can elect new politicians who will deliver what they want. In community-based, non-careerist local politicians, therefore, we can see individuals who want to be that difference, as one spelled out explicitly: '*I'm only in it because the system stinks; that's all I'm in it for*.'[77] There are, of course, a wide variety of motivations to stand for election; however, it is not surprising that there should be a higher incidence of what we might call activist-politicians amongst those actively supporting PB.

Accordingly, the ward councillors most passionate about U-Decide tended to share a strong critique of the existing system. Here, a Denton councillor clearly espouses a non-elitist democratic approach:

> '*Some of the councillors, both sides, they'll not know who their ward manager is. You know, they'll not have a mobile contact for them. I've got them in here. Some of them don't even know the neighbourhood response team, or the street cleaners' names. Honest. Don't know who the wardens are. Don't know how to contact them or nothing. Cos they just run for – they like to be in the big Civic Centre, the big I-am, getting theirselves in the paper*.'[78]

The critique also incorporated the culture of expertise which restricted democratic control. A Newburn councillor, who bemoaned the '*jargon, which sometimes we as councillors don't understand*,' described a well-attended community meeting about the closure of a local school, in which he symbolically sat with his constituents, rather than on the panel:

[77] Interview 24, ward councillor, Denton, 27/01/2009.
[78] Interview 24, ward councillor, Denton, 27/01/2009.

> '*We had councillors sitting at the bench, and I was sitting in the audience, and they said "Come and sit here." And I said "No, I'm not here to sit and look upon people. I'm part of this community. This is the community I represent, all these people here." I'm sitting with about two or three hundred people, in the middle of a hall … and [I said], "The officers sitting here tonight, you don't know a thing about the area, you don't know what's happening, but you're coming with your proposals, you're pushing it forwards to councillors like us, to go ahead and rubber-stamp it."*'[79]

Unsurprisingly, these councillors saw citizens' lack of faith in the council as both understandable, and justified:

> '*You know, they'll come to you with a complaint, and you'll say, well, who've you reported that to – "I haven't reported to naebody, I'm just reporting to you." "So, you haven't gone through the proper channels?" "Waste of bloody time." That's the first thing they say to me. It's a waste of time. I know where they're coming from; it's the truth … I try to make things better*.'[80]

This view of the state was combined with a recurring sense of disappointment, that no matter how hard you work, or how much you want to make a difference, the system defeats you (as acknowledged by the former Leader of the Council: '*some of my colleagues are saying, if I'd realised it was going to be as frustrating as this, I would never have stood for election in the first place*').[81] This rang true in Newburn and Denton:

> '*It's a big learning curve going in to be a councillor, a hell of a learning curve, cos I know when I went in, I thought, wa-hey! I'm ganna start, I'll do this, and I'll do that, and I'll clear all that rubbish, and … everything we wanted as a community. "Sorry, councillor, you can't do that." "Sorry, councillor, you can't do that." "Ooh, sorry, councillor, you can't do that." Well, what's the point of being a councillor? What <u>can</u> I do?*'[82]

[79] Interview 14, ward councillor, Newburn, 17/11/2008.
[80] Interview 24, ward councillor, Denton, 27/01/2009.
[81] Interview 25, ward councillor (and former Leader of the Council), Denton, 28/01/2009.
[82] Interview 26, working group member and former councillor, group interview, Newburn ward, 16/02/2009.

> '*They hate councillors, a lot of them. They think we're on about 35 grand a year, man, [that] we get everything for nothing. That's the thing. I mean, the hours I put in. I did 13 hours yesterday; I'm out till half five tonight. It's like that 5 days a week. You can't blame them though. Honest, you can't. I know what it's like. I've had loads of people tell me you're all the bloody same. I just laugh. Sometimes it eats into you, people feeling like that*…'[83]

What is significant is that for these councillors, as for the citizens referred to above, there is an apparent mismatch between what they value about democracy – including their own democratic participation – and what they know of the reality. To an extent, they remain trapped within the system. Arguably, a more explicit challenge to the status quo, in the form of a clearly articulated alternative democratic vision, might help resolve this discrepancy.

With regard to U-Decide, it is not hard to see how a frustration with the limited difference they are able to make as ward councillors contributes to a sense that 'mainstreaming' the programme would have to be about extra resources (a view reinforced by the fact that the pilots came with additional funding). Thus, the Newburn area coordinator reported that the ward committee were '*making a commitment, but they need to know where the money is coming from*'.[84]

Importantly, there isn't outright opposition from any of the actor-groups. On the contrary, there is widespread support. However, a close look at motivations and underlying assumptions has suggested a variety of attitudes to the goal of shifting sovereignty. In the remainder of the chapter, I look at how these views on sovereignty are manifested in practice, including evidence of what we might consider to be persistent 'representative habits of mind'.

RELOCATING SOVEREIGNTY?

PB advocates are working to create an egalitarian decision-making space in a context marked by a strong representative bias. As I have discussed, this has implications for the broader development of the programme, in that it limits the extent to which some key actors are actually engaged in an attempt to shift sovereignty. This is illustrated by the 'representative habits of mind' observable

[83] Interview 24, ward councillor, Denton, 27/01/2009.
[84] Participant observation record: officer evaluation meeting, Newburn ward, 03/12/2008.

within the programme. By this, I mean evidence of learned assumptions which belong to a representative understanding of democracy, but which are applied uncritically within the participatory setting. What I intend to convey here is not criticism of attempts to address material problems within real processes (which, almost by definition, exist within an ideologically challenging democratic context). Rather, my aim is to explore the ways in which the development of the programme can be constrained by fixed assumptions about democracy.

The most readily identifiable example of 'representative habits of mind' relates to what is understood to 'count' as democratic legitimacy. In contrast to Porto Alegre, where activists consider the direct participation of individuals a core principle, there was frequently a tacit assumption that participating citizens should represent 'the community'. In other words, for some, there was an apparent struggle to know how to understand wider participation as a legitimate means of decision-making if it is not in some sense representative.

With regard to citizen participation at voting events, this surfaced in debates over who should attend, and how they should make decisions. Should participation be managed, because those in the room are understood to be deciding on behalf of the whole ward, or should it be open access (as in Porto Alegre) with an associated visible link between mobilisation and outcomes?

The latter perspective was dominant amongst PB organisers and citizens.[85] A community development worker reported that the young people she worked with felt that '*their voice was reduced*' by the decision to limit attendance and voting rights,[86] while working group members wanted people to understand that '*it's not just for groups; it's for you – right across the estate*.'[87] The Social Policy team linked the case for wider participation to democratic motivation:

> '*I do think that is democracy, and people might say, well, they brought 20 people, well, yeah, because 20 bothered to turn up on the day*.'[88]

[85] A small minority of working group members disagreed, but this was restricted to the 'Denton reps' who tended towards the view that '*a nice mix comes along now, from the various groups that's in the ward*' (interview 29, working group member, Denton ward, 20/03/2008). Arguably, these citizens have equally well-developed 'representative habits of mind'.
[86] Participant observation record: community development worker, Grand Voting Event, Newburn ward, 15/11/2008.
[87] Interview 30, group interview, Denton working group members, 26/03/2009.
[88] Interview 16, joint interview, council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 27/11/2008.

Open attendance clearly places sovereignty with the people. Their participation matters; they can affect the outcome (therefore, this approach coheres with what I have called a 'citizen-eye' perspective, rather than an 'engineer's-eye view'). As one working group member put it:

> '*It's no wonder that you've got the ones that are undesirables, cos nobody wants them invited – well, I do … cos if they can see the difference that we're making, they may not be undesirable … you know, it's about engaging the community – so let's engage them!*'[89]

However, councillors used to operating at executive level tended to express the opposing view, arguing for controlled attendance:

> '*One way of trying to make sure that there were some independent voices there, would be to allow independent people, but then I guess you would have to say, well, how can you prove that these people are independent; how do you know that they've not been chosen by the people who are presenting and they're all their supporters or whatever? It just gets far too complex*.'[90]

The implication here is that the only legitimate motivation is disinterested; there is a sense that participants are expected to take a 'whole ward view', as an elected representative might, rather than participate as themselves, with their own desires and allegiances. This quote illustrates the extent to which this is an 'engineer's-eye view', implying as it does the primacy of external grounds for judging decisions made through the process. Accordingly, participation needs to be controlled (by the state) in order to ensure a valid outcome.

It is important to note that there was no real indication of 'bad' decision-making at voting events; therefore, interest in this issue did not arise in response to a tangible problem. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that participants attended to the presentations, took the responsibility of voting seriously, and, importantly, believed the process to be fair.[91] Nevertheless, a concern with 'good' decisions (and an accompanying preoccupation with assessing their quality or 'fairness') was a recurrent theme. For some, this was evidently a

[89] Interview 28, working group member, Denton ward, 20/03/2009.
[90] Interview 25, ward councillor (and former Leader of the Council), Denton, 28/01/2009.
[91] Participant observation record: Grand Voting Events, Newburn ward, 15/11/2008 & 21/03/2009, Denton ward, 29/11/2008 & 28/03/2009.

desire to 'test' the process (such as the officer who worked through each handset allocation, to see if people voted most for the area they lived in),[92] while others aimed to prove the quality of decision-making in order to build support for the process.[93] Interestingly, officers at times defined good decision-making as having the same outcomes as if they had made the decisions themselves; for example, commenting '*how sensible the decisions are – the same decisions that officers would have made!*'[94] By contrast, as I have said, it was of primary importance for citizens that the outcomes were different; indeed, that was often their motivation for getting involved. This (citizen-eye) perspective does not diminish the importance of outcomes, but it does require that they are determined within the process, not in advance.

The issue in terms of sovereignty is that this is held by those who accord themselves the right to judge what constitutes a 'good' decision. If citizens are sovereign within the process, the decision they reach is valid (regardless of whether the state agrees with it or not). Conversely, if the state retains the right to validate decisions, it remains sovereign.

'Representative habits of mind' were also strongly in evidence with regard to the working groups. On one hand, they were frequently treated – even described – as if they were representative of the community. Thus, the Deputy Leader referred to the working group as demonstrating legitimacy by virtue of being '*elected members of community groups*,'[95] though being an elected official of a community group was decidedly not a requirement for membership of the (self-selected) working groups. Evidently, the elected member struggled to express a sense of democratic legitimacy not based in representation. The Denton working group were also asked directly, '*as members of the working group, as community representatives, do you feel you have the skills to run with this, yourselves?*'[96] The extent of this extrapolation was illustrated by repeated occasions on which the term 'community' was used to refer to the working group. For instance, one councillor described the operation of the working group as follows:

[92] Interview 18, joint interview, area coordinators, 28/11/2008.
[93] Participant observation record: Social Policy team meeting, 27/01/2009.
[94] Participant observation record: officer and working group evaluation lunch, 02/12/2008.
[95] Interview 27, Cllr David Faulkner, Deputy Leader, Newcastle Council, 02/03/2009.
[96] Participant observation record: Newcastle Council U-Decide evaluation workshop, 30/04/2009.

Councillor: *there were tensions between the community's views of what the process was, and … officers' and councillors' views of the process.*

Interviewer: *when you say the community's views, do you mean, as expressed by the working group?*

Councillor: *yes, yeah. The working group very much took to heart a phrase which was that the process was community-led. They took that to mean community-dominated. Where the community took all the decisions and they were not particularly happy that officers and councillors were part of the process.*

Interestingly, the representational loop was closed when the same councillor concluded that therefore voting wasn't a necessary part of U-Decide if working group deliberations proved conclusive (as I described in the last chapter, this was strenuously resisted by some members of the working group).

It is not hard to see how this approach exacerbated the situation in Denton where some experienced community reps assumed their right to speak for 'the community'. Over time, officers and councillors (and, it is important to add, some members of the group itself) became increasingly uncomfortable with the perceived lack of accountability of the Denton working group. This was most visible at sifting days, where proposals put forwards by a community association 'disliked' by vocal members of the working group were consistently rejected.

At the sifting day for the November event, though some members of the group spoke strongly for inclusion at the voting event on the grounds of the process criteria, the (close) overall vote went against two projects, while similar proposals from different organisations were approved.[97] Members who voted against the projects were unwilling to discuss reasons for the decision. Officers were very unhappy both at being left to communicate the outcome to the proposing association, and the lack of an adequate justification.[98]

[97] It is worth noting that concerns about the organisation's delivery capacity (for example) would not have been a valid reason for rejection at this stage, as the working group's role was simply to determine if each project fitted the funding criteria; decisions on whether projects should be funded were to be made at the Voting Event.

[98] Participant observation record: sifting day, Denton ward, 21/10/2008. Similar events occurred during the March process (participant observation record: sifting day, Denton ward, 12/03/2009).

As a result of such incidents, there was a heightened awareness that the working group was not representative of the ward (again, this was a shared view held by officers, councillors – including those that regularly referred to the working group as 'the community' – and some members of the working group). For councillors who identified with the existing system, this was addressed directly in representative terms:

> '*You've got to realise, the working group are setting themselves up as an alternative decision-making body. Some time, someone will ask, "who do you represent?"*'[99]

Of course, this 'setting-up' was in fact a two-way dynamic – as is, by now, hopefully clear. Members of the Social Policy team and concerned working group members had a different response. They hoped to address the issue through broadening the group membership, expressed as a desire to make it more representative in terms of identity (generally by age or neighbourhood).[100]

As with wider participation at voting days, the only dissident citizen voices were those of the Denton 'experienced reps',[101] summed up in the following view:

> '*It's got the right people on, a right good mix. I mean, there's people that represent young people, there's people that represent their tenants' groups, there's people that represent the umbrella group, DCP [Denton Community Partnership], there's people that come on from the over 60's, you know, things like that, other groups, and high rise flats, there's people on from there. So, I think there is a good mix of people*.'[102]

The emphasis on speaking for the community is apparent. For example, where other working group members repeatedly returned to the question of how to encourage young people to join, here the representation of young people (in this case, by a volunteer youth group coordinator) was felt to be sufficient.[103]

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[99] Interview 25, ward councillor (and former Leader of the Council), Denton, 28/01/2009.
[100] This was also discussed in Newburn, though this appeared to arise more out of a desire for inclusiveness, than in response to particular concerns (other than a wish to demonstrate that the process was fair to all the villages of the ward; interviews 26 & 31, working group members, Newburn ward, 16/02/2009 & 26/03/2009).
[101] The issue was discussed at evaluation meetings for both Newburn and Denton. While in Newburn there was a shared enthusiasm for the idea, in Denton, the response was more mixed (participant observation record: working group evaluation meetings, 02/12/2008).
[102] Interview 29, working group member, Denton ward, 20/03/2008.
[103] Though not, it should be added, by the youth group coordinator herself.

Furthermore, in response to previous attempts to widen membership, the Denton group introduced rules about only joining within the first three meetings of each planning process.[104] These attitudes are perhaps unsurprising, given the degree to which the system consistently reinforces the message that there is power in representing others.

Other officer responses included looking for ways to discourage the working group using local knowledge, because this was being expressed in a problematic way ('*it's almost like a jury thing, where you are supposed to have no knowledge of the case beforehand, and to be able to make those decisions*'),[105] and from one officer who was passionate about involving the wider community, the reluctant desire to bypass the working group altogether:

> '*There's no accountability, and I think that was evident at the sifting day. I think even maybe officers should put things through to the Grand Voting Event … maybe less of a role for steering, maybe [the working group] will be part of the engagement. But I feel, as we're going down the road of risk assessment, have they got insurance, safeguarding children, we need to be a bit more savvy about where's this money going, not the "Oh, it's Betty Sue's idea, I'll let that go through," or even the councillors maybe, sift … and then they go to the public to vote on – or even the councillors maybe, sift, maybe the road safety ones go to another pot, and then they go to the public to vote on. So people aren't getting that power crazy. Or it's councillors and community members make that decision, but I think it needs to be more people round the table*.'[106]

This officer was unusual in being remarkably clear that the working group did not equate to the community, and, moreover, was concerned about '*new people who are a wee bit shy, who have got a really good contribution to make, but can't make it cos they're getting railroaded out*.'[107]

The fundamental issue in this situation is that almost everyone involved assumed that accountability had to be held by the state, not the wider community (indicating the persistent location of sovereignty). Accordingly, the

[104] Interview 33, working group member, Denton ward, 02/04/2009.
[105] Interview 16, joint interview, council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 27/11/2008.
[106] Interview 21, council officer, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 03/12/2008.
[107] Interview 21, council officer, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 03/12/2008.

state took responsibility for the behaviour of the group (as one officer said, '*it's almost like, have we created a monster here?*')[108] and tried to find a way to solve the problem.

The assumed direction of accountability is illustrated by the sense of betrayal felt by deeply committed officers and councillors:

> '*I just felt like standing up and saying, look, we've trusted you, you know, do this properly. And basically, you've gone and been really, really snidey about it. It's not what democracy's about*.'[109]

It is important to be clear that this didn't arise out of a lack of commitment to participatory democracy. This councillor (one of the 'activist-politicians' portrayed earlier) described the first Denton U-Decide as '*the best day of my life as a councillor*' and firmly believed that '*politicians do have too much say*.'[110]

This is not a simplistic issue; the existing system strongly underlines that understanding of accountability. Thus, one of the organisers reflected that '*the audit trail always leads back to the city council*.'[111] However, the alternative possibility, of supporting the wider community to hold the working group accountable for decisions taken in their name (i.e. the name of the community), was only raised by citizens themselves, as the same councillor described:

> '*What I have noticed this time, is three people come up to me, who are part of the community, and I think they want to challenge for a seat, for the next part, because they were absolutely disgusted with the decisions of the working group*.'[112]

Unfortunately, this wasn't a solution that the structure as it stood facilitated, and as a result, the U-Decide programme did not run again in Denton.

CONCLUSION

A close look at the assumptions and values animating the U-Decide programme suggests that citizens respond strongly to a more egalitarian model of

[108] Interview 32, community development worker, Newcastle Council, 27/03/2009.
[109] Interview 24, ward councillor, Denton, 27/01/2009.
[110] Participant observation record: Grand Voting Event, Denton ward, 29/11/2008; interview 24, ward councillor, Denton, 27/01/2009.
[111] Interview 16, joint interview, council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council, 27/11/2008.
[112] Interview 24, ward councillor, Denton, 27/01/2009.

democracy. There is, therefore, a gulf between the democratic narrative enacted by citizens participating in U-Decide, and the narrative embodied by the UK democratic system. The evidence from Newcastle further suggests that, as far as its core advocates are concerned, PB in the UK does represent a genuine attempt to enable a decision-making experience more in accord with egalitarian democratic values. The connection between these facts and the positive increase in participation via U-Decide seems clear. This is evidently of material importance in considering appropriate responses to the UK democratic deficit.[113]

However, it is also clear that the political will behind such initiatives can mask a spectrum of democratic goals. There is a complicated relationship between political support and the manifestation of an egalitarian democratic decision-making space within a strongly representative system. In the case of U-Decide, a high degree of political will did not therefore translate into fiscal and operational autonomy, or into a critical engagement with the existing system.

As I have suggested, this matters for two reasons. Firstly, this dynamic makes possible a focus on the egalitarian decision-making space as complementary to representative democracy, rather than as challenging its fundamentally elitist assumptions. In practice, this draws its sting as a 'supply-side' response to the democratic deficit. Secondly, the ideological tensions bleed into the alternative space itself, minimising the transfer of sovereignty, and ensuring that democratic control ultimately remains in the hands of the state. Despite its many highly positive outcomes, the U-Decide experience reinforces the impression that the location of sovereignty in the UK is subject to a high degree of inertia.

While there are certainly no easy answers to these dilemmas, the evidence presented here suggests that attending to and making visible these underlying narratives would be a fruitful avenue, most particularly in foregrounding the relocation of sovereignty as a primary goal. For democratic activists, this can be as simple as asking questions, for example: whether and how an egalitarian decision-making process allows for changed outcomes (in other words, who is sovereign within the space?), whether citizens or the state hold accountability

[113] In this vein, Henrik Bang (2009) argues that Barack Obama's 'Yes, we can!' campaign succeeded so notably precisely because it consciously invoked the idea of sovereign citizens creating change.

(and how), whether citizens are understood to represent themselves or expected to behave as if they represent others, and who decides when citizens can make decisions (who is sovereign over the space?).

Asking these questions does not, of course, in any way reduce the challenge of power within the existing system (and the desire of the powerful to hold onto it). However, the analysis presented here suggests that such questions could at least illuminate opportunities and limits in the struggle to develop a genuinely alternative democratic narrative.

In the following chapter, I explore a very different meeting of democratic narratives in Bradford, where PB supporters articulated a much more explicit challenge to the status quo – and consequently met with a more unequivocal response from the state.

CHAPTER 9

DEMOCRACY IN PRACTICE: CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO IN BRADFORD

Bradford was home to some of the UK's earliest participatory budgeting pilots, and while the initiative never became as embedded as Newcastle's U-Decide programme, it is of particular interest because it developed as part of a wider neighbourhood governance programme with explicit social justice aims. Thus, PB in Bradford was associated with a genuine ideological challenge to the status quo. As I described in chapter 6, the programme was led by Bradford Vision, the then Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), who facilitated several discrete PB processes, of which the largest and most substantial occurred in the town of Keighley in 2006. While many LSPs were housed within local government, Bradford was unusual in that the LSP was a company limited by guarantee, and therefore semi-independent of the local state. This was significant because it supplied the operational autonomy required for a more radical perspective on participation. The then Conservative-led local administration was strongly opposed to such an approach; accordingly, Bradford provides a complementary case study to Newcastle, in that it involved a more direct confrontation between the two democratic narratives.

In this chapter, I describe the Keighley PB process and outcomes, including increased participation and community-building (as well as some reflections on the role of the voluntary sector), before looking in a little more detail at the essentially egalitarian democratic narrative animating its development, and the response of the state, which was unambiguously rooted in the more elitist representative narrative typical of the UK system. I conclude with some reflections on how the dynamic created by this narrative encounter impacted on the democratic potential of Bradford's PB process, drawing out some implications for approaches to the democratic deficit.

KEIGHLEY DECISION DAY [1]

Keighley is a small northern town of just over 50,000 inhabitants, located within the District of Bradford but with a strong sense of its own identity. Bradford was historically a wealthy city, a major centre of the global textile industry. Today,

[1] Some elements of this section draw on previously published work (Blakey, 2008; 2010).

however, both Bradford and Keighley are de-industrialised and impoverished, with high levels of deprivation and unemployment, and below average levels of educational achievement and standards of living. Bradford District has a long history of immigration which fed the city's industrial growth, and which is with us still in the present-day diversity of the District. Like the city of Bradford, Keighley is home to a variety of geographically distinct, internally cohesive communities which tend to be defined by their ethnicity (see Ouseley, 2001).

The District's history is also present in the vibrancy of its civil society. It was, in 1893, the birthplace of the Independent Labour Party, and boasts a proud history of strikes and protest that shaped the labour movement in this country. However, in recent decades, the District has lost the heart of its organised labour force as a result of de-industrialisation, and seen the decline of trade union activity – a school for political activists which has not been replaced. The District has often been at the forefront of national policy initiatives, such as the Community Cohesion agenda (following the 'Bradford riots' of 2001) and the Neighbourhood Renewal agenda, the Labour government's key policy initiative around poverty and community, also launched in 2001.

In 2006, the Neighbourhood Renewal programme was one of Bradford Vision's two key responsibilities, the other being the LSP function of facilitating strategic partnership work. While the partnership work sat squarely within the nationally-led initiatives for participation and engagement referred to in chapter 6, its relationship to neighbourhood governance in Bradford was built primarily on the vision of two committed women. The Chief Executive of Bradford Vision and the Director of Neighbourhood Renewal had a history of working together in the District to support unheard voices, one inspired by her strongly held Christian faith, the other by her personal experiences of deprivation, homelessness and exclusion. They held a deep-seated belief that work on the ground to alleviate the effects of poverty and deprivation only ever patched over a fundamental power imbalance, which they wanted to address. Therefore, their commitment to increased participation was rooted in the belief that the system had failed, and that this was behind the failure of outcomes for the poorest citizens.

Across the District as a whole, they facilitated an approach to neighbourhood renewal work centred on Neighbourhood Action Planning (NAP): the creation of

Neighbourhood Renewal funded plans based on locally determined priorities, supported by Bradford Vision staff (initially, 12 Neighbourhood Partnership Managers (NPMs) across the District). The community groups developing these plans were encouraged to work with local service providers, creating a NAP group structure intended to act as a 'clearing house' for local information between service providers and citizens. In the 2004-2006 round of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF), £25,000 was available to a community group in each eligible area, for formulating and implementing a local plan.

The second round launched in 2006. While funds were again primarily allocated at local level by the NAP groups, in Keighley, the neighbourhood manager launched a PB process which, over the course of a year, allocated £130,000 of Neighbourhood Renewal money (public funds ring-fenced for development in the District's most deprived communities). This built on the 'Clean, Green' pilot mentioned in chapter 6 but went beyond it, opening up the process to every affected citizen, instead of the community groups previously invited. The Keighley experience underlines the role of individuals as key catalysts in the development of UK PB processes. In addition to the role played by Bradford Vision's leadership, the Keighley neighbourhood manager had, while working for a civil society organisation, heard Hilary Wainwright, author of *Reclaim the State*, a book about experiments in popular democracy (Wainwright, 2003), speak about participatory budgeting and was inspired. This prompted him to move to Bradford Vision, which was already experimenting with new forms of participation, and look for opportunities to bring PB to life in Bradford.

The key individuals leading the Keighley process therefore had a consciously radical vision for PB, focused on its redistributive potential, and also its political potential in terms of overhauling how and by whom decisions are made. This included the sense that '*grown-up conversations*'[2] can replace unrealistic demands – that this model can be liberating for service providers and the state as well as for people, through helping citizens understand the budgetary constraints on service providers, in addition to understanding their own needs.

Within Keighley, seven neighbourhoods met the economic deprivation criteria for inclusion: Highfield, Eastwood, Braithwaite & Guardhouse, Stockbridge,

[2] Interview 11, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 16/04/2007.

Brackenbank, Hainworth and Parkwood. While sharing economic similarities, they differ in other respects, most notably in terms of ethnicity. Eastwood and Highfield have a high Asian population while other areas are predominantly White (including Braithwaite & Guardhouse, an estate which at the time was being targeted by the British National Party).[3] As this money was 'extra' funds provided by the national government to address specific issues, the PB process did not affect the core council budget. It was, however, linked squarely to the goal of addressing poverty and attendant issues, including health, education and employment inequalities (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001:8).[4]

The process as it evolved in Keighley has been described as 'participatory grant-making' rather than budgeting, though the organisers did have aspirations to move beyond this. The process, in brief, developed as follows:

- In March 2006, the Neighbourhood Partnership Manager for Keighley presented a proposal to Bradford Vision, to use PB for the 2006-2008 round of NRF spending, which was accepted. Two spending rounds were planned, though this was later reduced to one, due to time constraints.

- He brought together a reference group, comprising Bradford Vision staff, Keighley Voluntary Services (the main VCS umbrella and support organisation in Keighley), the Council's area coordinator, and the UK PB Unit, who provided advice and support. From time to time other senior VCS officers and staff from the Bradford Vision themed partnerships attended these meetings.

- Bradford Vision secured additional funding through three of the four blocks of the Local Area Agreement: Children and Young People, Safer and Stronger Communities and Environment. This, together with NRF

[3] The British National Party (BNP) attempted to make political capital out of headline news stories about Asian men grooming young White girls, with a town councillor, Angela Clarke, being elected on the estate in 2004 (Keighley has a devolved town council, as well as belonging to Bradford District council). Many local citizens reacted strongly to this, and Cllr Clarke was barred from both the estate's community centres, on the grounds that the BNP contravened their equal rights policies. A local mother subsequently stood against the BNP, angry that the party was exploiting her family's story, and was elected in 2006. As a town councillor, she was very active in supporting the PB process.

[4] It is interesting to note in passing that UK government documents such as the Neighbourhood Renewal National Strategy do not, perhaps predictably, refer to poverty, but rather to 'disadvantage', begging the question of how meaningfully the government can engage with the poor if it will not name their existence.

money for the area resulted in a pot of £130,000, to be spent only in areas identified as ‘deprived’ and therefore eligible for NRF funds.

- During the summer of 2006 the reference group developed a ‘budgeting process’ which was implemented in the main by Bradford Vision and the Keighley Voluntary Services community development team. This was carried out at existing community events, and by going door-to-door in some of the areas. Citizens were individually asked to choose their top three priorities for their area from a list of nine, and given space to identify particular issues within those three categories, and suggest solutions. Approximately 400 citizens completed these forms.

- This information was collated. The reference group decided that the money should be distributed according to area allocations based on head of population, as this was a non-negotiable rule of NRF funding, and because it was felt to be too complex to allocate according to the themed data as well as by area.

- Local organisations were given information on the priorities generated (as a guide only), and invited to propose projects. This process was open to VCS groups, statutory organisations and private companies.

- The bids were scrutinised by a panel made up of local councillors, members of the PB reference group, and local staff from statutory organisations. The group’s remit was to ascertain that the bids met the rules of the process and to offer advice on deliverability to the applicant groups. They did not have a remit to reject bids – decisions on which projects received funding were to be taken by citizens at a voting event (this stage of the process was comparable to the U-Decide sifting days).

- Citizens resident in the areas involved were invited to a Decision Day held at the end of November (3 areas in the morning and 4 in the afternoon). A letter went out to all eligible households, posters and fliers were used, and the community development team spread the word (in practice, the most effective means of invitation).

- In total, approximately 300 citizens attended the Decision Day. Each project had three minutes to present their idea. Due to the number of projects, the schedule did not allow time for questions or discussion. When five projects had been presented, citizens were asked to give each a vote out of ten (using paper voting sheets). The next five projects were presented, and so on. The votes were collated, and results announced. There was a definite 'buzz' amongst organisations and citizens around the opportunity to be involved, and the additional benefits of the process, in particular networking across different areas of Keighley, and shared learning about different communities and organisations.

As I have said, the attitude of the elected state in Bradford was decidedly hostile, reflecting a more elitist democratic narrative. This narrative quickly gained the upper hand in the struggle for democratic practice in Keighley. The open ideological tensions between the council and Bradford Vision led the council to institute a review of Vision's LSP function which culminated in its demise (Bradford Vision as an organisation was structurally independent of the council, but its designation as the Local Strategic Partnership, and therefore its access to resources, was controlled by the council). The council took the LSP function back in-house, and the innovative work begun by Bradford Vision around neighbourhood action planning and participatory budgeting went into abeyance as a result. However, the story has some continuity; Keighley's neighbourhood partnership manager became an associate of the PB Unit and now shares his learning through the volunteer-run PB Network.

Referring back, then, to the core principles of PB as defined by key actors and analysts regarding Porto Alegre, we can see that the Keighley process involved the direct participation of individuals, the power to make real decisions (it was binding not consultative), and a commitment to social justice. It did not, however, involve a participant-regulated cycle of known events. Though the Neighbourhood Partnership Manager aimed to model a process which he hoped would catalyse an ongoing cycle of events, it was (and remained) a one-off pilot. Moreover, it was not participant-regulated, there being no citizens on the reference group which oversaw the process design and development.[5]

[5] Citizens were later involved in the project monitoring stages of the process, with about 8-10 attending local meetings in this capacity; spending plans were only to be altered with citizen

While efforts were made to involve elected councillors, the funds involved were not part of the core budget, and not directly overseen by the Council, therefore there cannot be said to have been a combination of representative and participatory traditions (like U-Decide, PB in Bradford operated as a discrete decision-making space). Finally, deliberation was essentially missing from the process. The consultative 'budgeting' or prioritisation process rested on an individualised selection from a list. It did not require participants to explain, defend or test their views with others. Similarly, the voting procedure did not allow for discussion or questions.[6]

The Keighley neighbourhood manager identified the following factors as very important in creating space for this pilot to happen: the nature of Bradford Vision itself – large enough as a statutory organisation to put resources behind the idea, but small enough (hence free enough from institutional bureaucracy) to be creative and flexible, permission from senior managers to take risks, existing working relationships with other actors, specifically the voluntary sector in Keighley, and ownership by the VCS locally – not just by Bradford Vision. This last point was the result of conscious team working by the organisers.

These factors echo the operational and fiscal autonomy, 'political will' in the sense of the responsible authority, and partnership with civil society. There is however a question over the extent to which the process engaged a mobilised citizenry, given the absence of individual citizens from the planning process, and also the discrete nature of the event, which meant there was little opportunity for the kind of developmental dialogue implied by 'cooperation and contestation'. Furthermore, operational and fiscal autonomy existed by virtue of being insulated from the core budget, rather than through having control over it. Finally, the 'political will' came in the guise of a quasi-autonomous public body, explicitly not governed at operational level by the elected local state. While these conditions do present difficulties for implementing a radical process, and

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endorsement (there was a hope that this would embed citizen involvement in later planning processes). However, due to the demise of Bradford Vision, these did not come to fruition.

[6] It is important to note that the organisers would agree that the experience was neither perfect nor intended to be. They wanted it to be 'good enough' and consciously thought of it as a 'first time' – that what didn't happen this time, could be built on and developed (in the words of the Keighley NPM, '*it's just about keeping working, to make the thing better*', Interview 2, 19/12/2006). As with the Newcastle case study, the purpose of this reflection is not to criticise real processes (which are never ideal), but to learn more about where the radical potential lies, how it is being squeezed – and why.

as I will discuss, led to the presentation of PB as politically neutral, they may also illustrate the creative identification of opportunities on the part of value-driven actors in a less than ideal situation.[7]

PB OUTCOMES IN BRADFORD

Before exploring the dynamics of the narratives embodied within the Keighley PB experience, I will briefly examine what was arguably the most significant (and impressive) achievement of the process, the attendance of around 300 citizens at the voting day. This notwithstanding, because citizens were only involved at the decision-making stage, not during the planning process, the potential for wider democratic learning and altered relationships with the state (as observed in Newcastle) was severely restricted. However, Bradford affords some interesting insights regarding the potential for community-building and the role of the voluntary sector, which I also discuss below.

Approximately 100 people were present for the morning session of the Decision Day, including presenters (many of whom, being local residents, were also eligible to vote). Unlike in Newcastle, participant profile figures were not recorded. However, most were White, with some Asian participants; there was a fairly even spread between men and women, and different age groups. Around 200 people attended in the afternoon. Of these, over 90 came from one (largely Asian) area, Eastwood. Between 20 and 30 attended from each of two further areas (one predominantly White and one predominantly Asian), with just 4 from the final (largely White) area. There were a higher proportion of female participants in the afternoon than the morning, and a marked increase in working age adults.[8] Bradford Vision strongly believed that the process reached many new people who had not been involved in local decision-making before;[9] a view supported by my observations and short interviews at the voting event. For example, many of the Eastwood participants were mothers supporting their children's school, who said they had never been to '*anything like this*' before.[10]

[7] This notwithstanding, Baiocchi & Ganuza comment that while the 'expert' presentation of PB as value-neutral might feel like a necessity in order to introduce it in certain contexts, this can limit the potential for opening up discussion of empowerment outcomes later (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2014:44); I discuss this tension further later in the chapter.
[8] Participant observation record: Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/2006.
[9] Participant observation record: Decision Day Debrief Session, Bradford Vision, 05/12/2006.
[10] Participant observation record and short interviews (1i-1xviii): Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/2006.

In Keighley, unlike Newcastle, the PB process operated on the basis of open invitation, a 'right to participate'. This meant that organisers had no way of knowing in advance how many participants to expect. In the event, attendance exceeded the expectations of everyone involved.[11] Moreover, for the organisers, it was important to consider attendance against existing levels of participation; in the case of the NAPs this was no more than 5-6 people in each neighbourhood, and often fewer.[12]

In keeping with the findings from Newcastle, the participants I interviewed expressed their motivation for attending principally in democratic terms, sometimes explicitly, sometimes in terms that revealed the value placed on participation for change:

> '*It's been worth it. Being here, and thinking yes, I feel strongly about that, and I want to be part of the decision making process*.'[13]

> '[*I came*] *to support our community, for the children; it's something that's needed.*'[14]

> '*I think the community voting is very important, 'cause you can't just have ten people from the community saying, right, this is the best thing to do. The community needs the choice to make, so that's a very good step*.'[15]

Some participants expressed a strong sense of the importance of collective action for change:

> '*I've never been to anything like this before … I was hoping that it would make a difference. I know one on their own can't do much, but if you get a few together you can sometimes move forwards*.'[16]

For some, a belief in collective action combined with the high turnout to form a virtuous circle, which supported their own commitment to being civically active:

[11] Participant observation record: Facilitator's Briefing Session, Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/2006.
[12] Participant observation record: PB planning meeting, Keighley Voluntary Services, 29/06/2006.
[13] Interview 1xii, Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/2006.
[14] Interview 1iv, Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/2006.
[15] Interview 1xiii, Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/2006.
[16] Interview 1v, Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/2006.

'*It's not very easy, but something like this, where you actually see residents of your area here, who have similar concerns and are worried about issues that are affecting the area, you know, it gives you that bit of a boost. You feel you want to help, contribute [to] making a difference*.'[17]

The large turnout from Eastwood was understood by participants and organisers alike to have occurred because, ten days before the vote, the head teacher of a primary school putting in a bid held a parents' evening, and explained that if people came to the event, they would make a difference to the school – in other words, that their participation would have results.[18] This clearly illustrates the 'citizen-eye' perspective, which rests on a transparent understanding that your presence can make a difference. For the organisers, the turnout confirmed their hopes for the process:

'*Once they understood that their presence in the room would make an actual difference on who got money in their neighbourhood, they came*.'[19]

Despite this, organisers feared that the imbalance in numbers would be perceived as unfair by participants from other neighbourhoods, and hastily proposed a cap on voting numbers from each area. However, participants from Eastwood strongly objected to being turned away after making the effort to attend, and in the event everyone was allowed to vote. Importantly, while some participants did voice concerns about fairness prior to the voting (understood by the organisers to relate to tensions between White and Asian communities),[20] the evaluation forms from the end of the day showed that the overwhelming majority of voters (and a clear though smaller majority of presenters)[21] felt that the process had been fair and effective. This was expressed by two women who were disappointed in the attendance from their own neighbourhood, but who were nonetheless positive about the Eastwood turnout:

Participant: *Actually, for me, this is a great surprise, so many people are here. It's more of a turnout than any other meeting I've been to before …*

[17] Interview 1viii, Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/2006.
[18] Participant observation record: Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/2006; informal interview, Bradford Vision, 30/11/2006.
[19] Interview 2, Keighley NPM, Bradford, 19/12/2006.
[20] Participant observation record: Facilitator's Briefing Session, Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/2006.
[21] I discuss some of the reasons for presenters' more mixed views, later in the chapter.

They've obviously had a big push at the Eastwood end to get loads of people here … I think that might be the result of maybe what's gone on at the primary school, where the head teacher has said 'come on, you've got to go to this, vote for us; it's the only way we're going to get the money, if you vote for it'.

Interviewer: *and, not coming from that area, how do you feel about that?*

Participant: *that's fine; I have no worries about that at all. If they can be involved, that's all well and good. I think it's great. Rather than being passive, they are showing that they want to be active*.[22]

The high participation in Bradford appears to be connected to motivations cohering with the egalitarian democratic narrative. These include a belief in citizen capacity to make decisions (both implicit in the value placed on citizen participation, and expressed as '*local knowledge*')[23] and the legitimacy and power of collective action. In addition, some initial scepticism prior to the event (for example, '*it's about time!*' and '*as long as the people making the decisions listen to what the people are proposing and really think it through, and hopefully the decisions haven't been made before today*')[24] suggests a more critical view of the existing system, in keeping with the views expressed in Newcastle.

While the pilot was too limited to produce definitive evidence, there were nevertheless some indications that (as in Newcastle) the increased participation was associated with an appetite for more engagement of this type. While there was more mixed feedback from community groups applying for money (some preferring a more traditional process),[25] citizens tended to be enthusiastic about 'doing it again', with around ten putting their names forwards to be involved in ongoing monitoring. Significantly, much of the criticism of the process focused on a desire for *more* direct democratic engagement, not less.[26] Accordingly, on the voting day, participants voiced concerns about the lack of opportunity to ask

[22] Interview 1xii, Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/06.
[23] Interview 1xvi, Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/06.
[24] Participant observation record: budget consultation, Braithwaite & Guardhouse estate, 07/07/2006; interview 1ii, Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/06.
[25] A point I will return to shortly.
[26] This was one of three main areas of criticism, alongside, as I have mentioned, community groups who preferred a more traditional funding process, and the response of the state.

questions of presenters.[27] Those who were critical of the decision-making tended to suggest more deliberation, rather than less participation:

> '*I have some very important comments which I think are very important and if they're not seen and that project gets it, those other things which could play a part in it, won't be known … I think you need a bit more depth into what, so these comments are better than what they were saying. It was like an advertisement, where this is like the small print. The small print I feel wasn't given out. It's like a credit card, all flashy, but with the small print. That's what I think was missing…*'[28]

> '*This isn't participation if there is no discussion – for me, that's what participation is*.'[29]

This criticism was often phrased in terms of how to 'do it better next time'.[30] This indicates that these were not ideological objections; rather, they reflect a desire for more informed decision-making by citizens.

In a similar vein, there is clear evidence that officers were learning about democratic process through the experience of PB. While the Keighley neighbourhood manager was consciously inspired by Porto Alegre, it was striking that others were visibly working things out as the process unfolded. Thus, a Neighbourhood Partnership team leader made the following suggestion:

> '*This might be a radical move, but what if you don't have neighbourhood allocations, just one pot? … If you lose out, you mobilise… people would be pissed off, but they would get another chance*.'[31]

Likewise, more than one officer brought up the importance of informing people better, if they are making real decisions:

> '*I'm thinking off the top of my head here, maybe we should be thinking a lot more about supporting the process by providing opportunities for people to learn a little bit more about what the other alternatives are.*

[27] Participant observation record: Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/2006.
[28] Interview 1xiii, Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/06.
[29] Participant observation record: conversation with council officer, Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/2006.
[30] Participant observation record: Keighley NAP meeting, 05/12/2006.
[31] Participant observation record: PB Decision Day Debrief Session, Bradford Vision, 05/12/2006.

Saying to people, you know, have you tried this, did you know this, did you know that?'[32]

'*I think if you're talking about using it to decide how public services should be delivered, then the residents that are [deciding] need to be informed appropriately. So what is the implication of voting for this, do you know what I mean, for saying we want this as opposed to that*?'[33]

As with similar learning observed in Newcastle, it is apparent that this kind of support for citizen education is a consequence of sharing some power; these officers did not see the same imperative for citizens to understand what they are voting for within the existing representative system. Arguably, because they were working in the context of a governance programme which was trying to change outcomes (rather than meet a target of increased participation), they had to think about what is needed to connect participation with outcomes, rather than simply what is needed to increase participation.

The second strong theme from Bradford relates to cohesion. As I have described, community divisions in Keighley are understood to be a significant issue. While participants very much valued hearing about projects in their own areas, some describing how they had learned about facilities and activities they didn't know existed,[34] many also explicitly valued hearing about those in *other* communities.[35] A distinctive feature of Bradford Vision's previous PB processes had been the 'give-back' (after the results were announced, successful projects were invited to voluntarily reduce the amount they received, in order to fund more projects). [36] This visibly translated interest in other communities' needs into actual support – arguably fitting the definition of 'negotiated solidarity' that was so important in Porto Alegre. Thus, someone from a small 'neglected' area on the edge of a larger community, whose local project was funded through the give-back, declared that '*this event has restored my faith in human nature*'.[37]

[32] Interview 4, Keighley area coordinator, 11/01/2007.
[33] Interview 8, Neighbourhood Partnership Manager, Bradford Vision, 22/01/2007.
[34] Interview 1xiv, Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/06.
[35] Participant observation record: review of evaluation forms, PB Decision Day Debrief Session, Bradford Vision, 05/12/2006.
[36] This was not included at the Keighley event due to time constraints associated with the increased scale of the process.
[37] Participant observation record: informal interview, Bradford Vision, 30/11/2006.

While clearly small-scale, this example reinforces the suggestion from Newcastle that learning more collective civic behaviour may be possible in the UK context, as well as in more democratically hospitable environments. For Bradford Vision, this relates directly to the nature of engagement:

> '*Where people are taken seriously, where they are listened to, they become generous*.'[38]

Importantly, there is also an echo of the learning from Porto Alegre that solidarity of this kind is connected to decisions between competing needs. To give a negative example, a Keighley community activist who was deeply critical of the PB process, argued for individual events in each neighbourhood precisely to avoid that element of competing needs between neighbourhoods – because '*we don't care about the rest of Keighley*'.[39] This relates back to the point I made in chapter 4, that democracy requires real dilemmas, a reality that was apparent in Keighley (and which evidently did foster democratic learning):

> '*I've never been to anything like this before. There's so many people all needing funding. How do you choose them all? I find that difficult*.'[40]

> '*It's just hard to decide … there isn't enough money to go round*.' [41]

If the state decides *for* citizens which neighbourhood gets what, the decision is not then about resources, but simply about implementation. In other words, to foster democratic behaviour, we need to be engaged in democratic decisions.

Similarly, several voluntary sector workers at Keighley Decision Day appreciated the opportunity for greater connections between citizens and their work, as this charity worker articulated:

> '*I actually think it's really good, because that's the reality … it's about the community, it's about their needs, it's not just about us saying this is about money and we want this money. It's about what do people really need from us as a service*.'[42]

[38] Interview 11, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 16/04/2007.
[39] Participant observation record: Keighley NAP meeting, 09/06/2006.
[40] Interview 1v, Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/06.
[41] Interview 1iv, Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/06.
[42] Interview 1iii, Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/06.

However, a vocal minority of voluntary sector workers and community activists expressed a very different view. Thus, a well-known 'community leader' from one area of Keighley (which was well represented at the voting event) said:

> '*There is an issue of losing face with the community … I prefer the traditional way of allocating funds, so that Bradford Vision or a committee would select who to fund. [We] could either apply or give a presentation, directly to the committee, who would choose. The community would not be directly involved*.'[43]

Two activists from a different neighbourhood, who were (like the 'experienced' Denton reps) used to representing their community on a variety of boards and committees, also had reservations. They submitted a formal complaint to Bradford Vision because they felt PB took control away from their NAP group:

> '*There's been no checks and balances; there has been no genuine input from the community into the process. The neighbourhood action planning group has been bypassed*.'[44]

While this might have plausibly reflected frustration that citizens weren't involved in the planning, these activists were clear they had been against the process all along, rather than seeking to shape it.[45] Furthermore, it is significant that they previously spoke *against* wider citizen involvement at a meeting of their NAP group, because they said they themselves brought 'resident views' from their community centre's meetings and help desk.[46] It is telling that the use of the term 'community' to refer to the NAP group here echoes the usage in Newcastle, illustrating the same conflation of a small number of 'community leaders' with the wider community as a whole. Between 20 and 30 people from these two activists' neighbourhood were present at the voting event.

All this suggests the 'representative habits of mind' discussed in the last chapter. For some, there appears to be more willingness to speak for the community (on whose behalf the funding is requested) than to speak with it. For organisers (and frequently for workers and activists too, as mentioned above), the fact that the process enhanced their engagement with the communities they

[43] Participant observation record: research visit to Keighley, 8th March 2007.
[44] Interview 1xviii, Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/06.
[45] Interview 1xvii, Keighley Decision Day, 25/11/06.
[46] Participant observation record: Keighley NAP meeting, 09/06/2006.

serve was '*a reality check for them – the residents are the people they are delivering services to; if they can present their work to them and convince them…*'[47] This is reminiscent of the 'practice of citizenship' that I referred to in Porto Alegre – activists facing their communities rather than the state.

Arguably, to the extent that a democratic process can create both opportunity and appetite for decision-making within communities, as opposed to a supplicant relationship between communities and the state, the potential for a shift in sovereignty exists.

PB AS A CHALLENGE TO THE SYSTEM

One of the most striking things about Bradford's PB advocates is their passion.[48] This is not just a job; it is activism. The officers most centrally involved described their motivation thus:

> '*What I saw was not victims, but people – through not being heard – being kept in places of powerlessness. So I deeply believe that my voice as someone who's been on that journey is absolutely crucial to finding a workable solution to poverty and disadvantage*.'[49]

> '*This is the first time I've actually felt really fulfilled about what I am doing professionally*.'[50]

Indeed, the most senior organiser at Bradford Vision told me she realised she would resign over PB being blocked in Bradford, that it was '*somehow symbolic*' of what she and Bradford Vision were trying to achieve. As she said:

> '*I'm not in this for a career, or advancement, but to do this thing … people say, "Who are you to do that?" Who am I <u>not</u> to? I am a citizen of Bradford*.'[51]

In Bradford, the PB process unequivocally stemmed from a deep-seated commitment to challenging poverty and injustice, which were seen as ingrained in the existing system. That system was understood to have failed in three

[47] Participant observation record: Keighley Voluntary Services, 05/12/2006.
[48] A passion matched by the most 'hands-on' U-Decide officer, who was utterly dedicated to changing the experience of citizens in Newcastle, and told me "*I love this job; it's my life*" (participant observation record: informal interview, Social Policy Unit, 21/10/2008).
[49] Interview 5, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 13/01/2007.
[50] Interview 2, Keighley NPM, Bradford, 19/12/2006.
[51] Participant observation record: informal interview, Bradford Vision, 08/01/2007.

interlinked ways: the inadequate outcomes it produced, the failure to recognise the capacity of citizens to make a difference, and the systemic gulf between decision-makers and citizens. I will briefly compare organisers' views of the status quo with their aspirational visions in each of these areas. This comparison underlines the extent to which the work in Bradford represents a more visible struggle between democratic narratives – and the extent to which, for Bradford Vision, injustice *requires* a different kind of democracy.

Firstly, there is an overriding sense that politics-as-usual has failed the poor, and, as the second quote makes clear, that in so doing, it has failed everybody:

> '*One of the things that very much drove me was the sense of absolute waste. You know, waste of people's lives – in a very wealthy nation. You know, how people could be born and live such … desperate lives*.'[52]

> '*Our work has been about that continued and deepening exclusion of some of our people, and we feel society cannot afford that*'.[53]

Moreover, '*dissatisfaction drives*'. [54] For Bradford Vision, recognising the need for change was a vital element in creating change. Thus, PB was explicitly about fundamental democratic change in the service of substantive equality.

Secondly, the system was seen to downplay the capacity of citizens to contribute to decision-making, through a culture of blaming people for their own situation.[55] Worse, it was seen to undermine it, by '*setting up an expert culture around things, that don't necessarily need to be expert … [the] mystification of common-sense knowledge*'.[56] In contrast, Bradford Vision's approach was rooted in the belief that '*we ain't going anywhere without communities*'.[57] This included the view that people experiencing a situation possess knowledge, reflecting a central belief in their existing skills and abilities ('*this is something we said over and over again, all of the city is held up by people's own actions, not by public services, you know, they only step in when something is*

[52] Interview 5, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 13/01/2007.
[53] Interview 11, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 16/04/2007.
[54] Interview 5, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 13/01/2007.
[55] Interview 5, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 13/01/2007.
[56] Interview 11, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 16/04/2007. See Illich, 1977, & Bevir, 2010, for two comprehensive discussions of the role of problematic role of 'expertise' in democratic process.
[57] Interview 11, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 16/04/2007.

stretched').[58] Citizens, therefore, are understood to bring something unique and important to the decision-making process, a view on their own circumstances which people might need support to express, but which should be included:

> '*That outsider's point of view can give you, with some tools to help make some constructs around that, a view of things that's slightly different to how other people see things*.'[59]

In this vein, PB was seen as a means of placing citizen knowledge centre-stage (this was linked to the binding nature of the process, as this quote illustrates):

> '*[It's] a direct link between local people's inputs and priorities and knowledge … and how that money gets spent, rather than just the very bland, broad brush consultation process which officers can choose to ignore if they want … because the money will be spent on the say-so of the citizen rather than on the say-so of a set of paid officers who are acting on behalf of the citizens, or elected representatives who are acting on behalf of the citizens.*'[60]

Furthermore, for Bradford Vision, citizen decisions didn't need to be perfect – because they recognised that existing decisions weren't either:

> Interviewee 1: '*OK, people don't always have all the information, and neither do you actually … you don't have all the information either*.'
>
> Interviewee 2: '*And you don't always make good decisions*.'
>
> Interviewee 1: '*So, let go and trust*.'[61]

A fundamental belief in citizen capacity is revealed by the depth of commitment to citizen learning shown in Bradford, through the phased development of the NAPs (for example, in the second round asking citizens to develop their plans with reference to local statistical information and floor targets),[62] and through the attempt to run the Keighley PB pilot as a two-stage process. Though this didn't come to fruition, the attempt was firmly rooted in the belief that citizens learn through participation, that witnessing the connection between participation

[58] Interview 5, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 13/01/2007.
[59] Interview 5, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 13/01/2007.
[60] Interview 2, Keighley NPM, Bradford, 19/12/2006.
[61] Interview 11, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 16/04/2007.
[62] Participant observation record: informal interview, Bradford Vision, 08/01/2007.

and outcomes in the first round would increase '*understanding, commitment and participation*'.[63] Thus, when VCS partners voiced their concern that a project might bring lots of people, the Keighley neighbourhood manager responded that '*it's a good thing … that's the thinking behind it, it's about mobilising people, and if people complain, they need to come next time*!'[64]

The third way in which Bradford Vision understood the existing system to be failing was the distance between the state and citizens, characterised by a relationship which was at best paternalistic[65] and at worst dismissive ('*they couldn't give a hoot about some of the poorest communities … cos they weren't voting, or they couldn't count on their votes*').[66] Crucially, this was regarded as systemic rather than the fault of individuals, with adversarial party politics, the disempowerment of local politics by national government (with the result that they don't '*have their roots into the community*') and '*mad management performance target ways of looking at the world*' all identified as contributing factors.[67] For Bradford Vision, what these things had in common was the effect of entrenching distance between decision-makers and communities:

> '*The disconnection between what strategic decision-makers knew and were experiencing, what they were being told, to be fair, and what was the reality on the ground*'.[68]

For the two women leading Bradford Vision, state-citizen proximity was in some sense the whole point of the neighbourhood governance programme, a framework in which PB was intended to catalyse greater citizen engagement and mobilisation,[69] in order to close the 'gap in knowledge' between the state and the citizens – and so enable change:

> '*You create a field where they can meet and hear, and that's the revolution. That's where the head then connects with the heart. And then, when they admit they don't know, then you can build new relationships, and that was it, and then we had to think about that. And say, so how do*

[63] Participant observation record: PB Planning Meeting, Bradford Vision, 09/05/06.
[64] Participant observation record: PB Planning Meeting, Keighley Voluntary Services, 10/10/2006.
[65] Interview 2, Keighley NPM, Bradford, 19/12/2006.
[66] Interview 5, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 13/01/2007.
[67] Interview 11, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 16/04/2007.
[68] Interview 5, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 13/01/2007.
[69] Interview 2, Keighley NPM, Bradford, 19/12/2006.

we take it forward. This is what you heard. Communities were saying we don't want to be shaped top-down any more. The top lot saying no matter what we do, it's not making any difference.'[70]

State-citizen proximity in Bradford was about much more than knowing each other better; it was clearly about deliberative problem-solving, underlining a belief in the collective potential within human nature:

'*The conversation, in order for it to be more productive, needs to become more grown up, you know, and people need to understand from both sides that these are difficult decisions that have to be made … I think in terms of redistribution perhaps it would be helpful to get everyone around the table and not just the poorer communities.*'[71]

It explicitly did not preclude conflict, as the senior management team discuss:

'*Partnership is not cosy. Dear god … do you want to see the scars? It's bruising, partnership work.*'

'*I think that what often gets covered up is this notion of power … pseudo liberal thing, you know, that we're all being very pally. And that has to be brought into the room.*'[72]

Nonetheless, through PB (and the framework for citizen participation in which it sat), Bradford Vision set out to convince the state that it had nothing to fear, that '*in letting go they get back*'.[73] Power is '*not a finite something, but an infinite something – and you don't break a bit off and give it to somebody else and therefore you've got less*.'[74] Thus, state learning was also considered essential:

'*In all this you cannot talk about involving and empowering people if you don't at the same time talk about involving and empowering workers, who work with them through the public services. It's the same story ... and you do one and not the other at your peril*.'[75]

[70] Interview 5, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 13/01/2007.
[71] Interview 2, Keighley NPM, Bradford, 19/12/2006.
[72] Interview 5, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 13/01/2007.
[73] Interview 11, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 16/04/2007.
[74] Interview 5, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 13/01/2007.
[75] Interview 11, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 16/04/2007.

It is noteworthy that this suggests a belief in the importance of meaningfully combining participatory and representative structures, despite the necessarily discrete nature of the Keighley process.

Attention to local scepticism meant that the idea of PB as 'show and tell' was a recurrent theme, the value of the 'live performance' in creating understanding. Bradford Vision's leadership were aware that '*politicians and chief executives are afraid that people will just bring wish lists*,' and wanted to demonstrate that these fears are groundless, that communities can be seen as partners, not problems.[76] There was an underpinning sense that the state learns through proximity to citizens, and thus a commitment to enabling the state to hear citizen voices, '*so that they could admit their own powerlessness in this, and admit that they didn't know that this was still happening in their own district*.'[77] For Bradford Vision, then, one outcome of PB was that '*it very rapidly shows … public services the range of things that people think they can do for themselves, which is helpful in terms of then deciding how you use your own budgets*'.[78]

While the need for the state to learn from citizens underlines a broad coherence between Bradford Vision's approach and the egalitarian democratic narrative, the last quote reveals something very interesting about sovereignty. The Neighbourhood Action Planning process in Bradford was essentially state-oriented in aims (an important point which I will discuss more fully later in the chapter). What the PB pilot represented was a serious attempt, led by the Keighley neighbourhood manager, to embed those values in a process which genuinely shifted power – and therefore sovereignty – towards citizens:

> '*Who decides what [the money] is spent on? Is it target driven from Whitehall? Or is it people in their neighbourhoods saying we want it to be spent on this? And that's the question, and that's what this is really throwing up, you know. And I think it should be the residents. Full stop. One hundred percent. And, they might get it wrong, as it were, to start with, but that's OK, because they can learn that. It's like Gandhi said: 'we have the right to govern ourselves badly'; it's that idea*.'[79]

[76] Participant observation record: informal interview, Bradford Vision, 08/01/2007.
[77] Interview 5, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 13/01/2007.
[78] Interview 11, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 16/04/2007.
[79] Interview 2, Keighley NPM, Bradford, 19/12/2006.

This clearly goes beyond a preoccupation with reassuring the state that citizens will make good decisions. Indeed, it was striking that, while critics of PB in Bradford referenced the decision-making quality, its core advocates (unlike their counterparts in Newcastle) did not. I will discuss the struggles for sovereignty embedded in Bradford Vision's state-facing orientation later in the chapter, but first I will turn to the response of the state in Bradford, the ideological roots of the 'local scepticism' that Bradford Vision was so alive to.

Defence of the existing system

I have made the case that PB in its Porto Alegrean form inspires because it is an actually existing example of the egalitarian democratic tradition. In Newcastle, I have suggested that while U-Decide's underpinning values cohere strongly with the egalitarian tradition, the programme was not rooted in explicit acknowledgement of the failures of the existing representative system. As we have seen, this described a limit to the transfer of sovereignty facilitated through the process. It was also, as a result, rather less challenging to existing power-holders, who could support the programme without fundamentally eroding the ideological basis for their own mandate.

In Bradford, where the critique of the existing system was unambiguous, the local administration's attitude to participatory democracy was equally definite. The views of Cllr Kris Hopkins, then Conservative Leader of the Council, are useful in illustrating how the individualistic narrative associated with representative democracy is present in the rejection of PB (and of the wider NAP programme). This was also reflected by Keighley's area coordinator, the local government officer who was the main Council contact for the Keighley PB process. His is an interesting perspective, because he sees himself as encouraging community engagement (indeed the area coordination role is considered the first point of contact for 'getting involved' with the council), but is strongly antipathetic to the more egalitarian model represented by PB. While these two individuals obviously only represent themselves, their perspective serves to illustrate the tension between the two democratic narratives.

It is worth noting at this point that the views quoted here don't artificially portray one end of a spectrum; they are simply those of the council officer (and ward councillor) most closely involved in supporting the PB process in Keighley,

alongside the Leader of the Council. It is hard, given the strength of feeling expressed, to disagree with the perspective of Bradford Vision's senior officers:

> '*It brings things to light; that's really interesting, the way that PB actually brings it out, this thing of councillors should decide, it comes again at us, in a way that we haven't seen, because there's quite a lot of good will about working with the NAPs really, but with PB, oh, it pops up again*.'[80]

I would add, there may specifically be something about a PB process which is rooted in an explicit challenge to the status quo.[81]

Unlike Bradford Vision, then, Cllr Hopkins strongly defended the current system:

> '*The cornerstone of our country, of our democracy, is that representation; is that individuals, or groups of individuals, who are placed in a position of power, on the basis of a manifesto, and given a clear direction of steer over of a period of time. They are accountable through the democratic process, and there is also a need to actually sustain some degree of stability, I think, in the direction of travel*.'[82]

Keighley's area coordinator put it still more bluntly:

> '*We have what I consider to be in this country, the best democratic process that you can get. I don't think you can circumnavigate it … that's why we don't have military juntas, that's why we don't have drug dealers running things – well, some parts of town they might do, but not that much – and that's why we don't have multinational companies telling us what to do, either, because you've got that election process … This natural assumption that, or conclusion that people jump to, that somehow local authorities aren't doing well, that they don't do a good job, is absolute poppycock … The question you're asking is, is there a better democratic system than the one that we've got already? Is there one? Is there one that exists anywhere? I don't think there is. I think what we've got is the best that we can get at the moment*.'[83]

[80] Interview 11, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 16/04/2007.
[81] These coheres with evidence from international PB literature which suggests that elected city councillors often opposed the process due to feeling side-lined (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2014:31).
[82] Interview 9, Kris Hopkins, Leader, Bradford Council, 30/01/2007.
[83] Interview 4, Keighley area coordinator, 11/01/2007.

Alongside the perceived stability that Cllr Hopkins valued in representative democracy, both saw it as generating more valid decisions than those made by citizens (as is also apparent from their views on citizen capacity):

> '*That's why we have elected members, they know they are going to be accountable; they know they will be held to account if things don't go right … There is no way the area committee will subscribe to [PB] as a process for deploying its own budgets, because, like me, they firmly believe in that democratic process, one vote, one person, you vote for the person to represent you because you think that they're the people who can do their best … People ask their politicians to act on their behalf. They're the people's advocates*.'[84]

This passage is particularly noteworthy because it incorporates the 'social contract' as legitimation for representative democracy. Here, a refusal to allow citizens a direct voice in decision-making is made in the name of the people, who are said to 'ask' their politicians to act on their behalf. Thus, citizens have neither sovereignty, nor a choice over relinquishing that sovereignty.

Interestingly, for Cllr Hopkins, a positive view of the system did not mean the absence of problems. Rather, he associated the problems with attempts to widen participation, rather than with the existing system:

> '*We have no shortage of partnership working in this district, we have a shortage of outcomes … Whereabouts are the arenas where the principal people with cheque books, with a clear mandate from organizations and institutions have a way to actually deliver? Now I am not sure whereabouts individual communities, outside of the democratic elected place … are going to be facilitated in that process, because we have got lots of them [participating] now, and we haven't delivered*.'[85]

Thus, he regarded broader forms of democratic participation as unnecessary, even as problematic. Cllr Hopkins saw '*a potential conflict between the two different ways of governing … [leading] open to chaos*',[86] and the area coordinator '*worr[ied] about systems that are brought in that actually undermine*

[84] Interview 4, Keighley area coordinator, 11/01/2007.
[85] Interview 9, Kris Hopkins, Leader, Bradford Council, 30/01/2007.
[86] Interview 9, Kris Hopkins, Leader, Bradford Council, 30/01/2007.

processes that have evolved over a period of time'.[87] Although, he did think broader participation might be necessary in some circumstances:

> '*I mean, it might be the preferable thing to do in South America, but you know, Bradford ain't South America – we ain't corrupt!*'[88]

In other words, the outcomes validate the process; the process does not determine what counts as a legitimate outcome. Accordingly, as I mentioned earlier, critics of PB in Bradford focused on the quality of decisions as a source of legitimacy (or otherwise). From this ideological standpoint, there is no right to participation, and so decisions viewed as poor (by the state) do not generate more support for or closer engagement with citizen decision-making, but invalidate that participation. Thus, a Keighley councillor who was actively engaged with the PB pilot, and very supportive of its community development aims, had reservations about more strategic citizen participation:

> '*We thought it was nice; we thought it was good. We thought that the right people got the money for the things that they felt were important for their area. Whether, if you started to look at bigger, more core money from the council, I think then we might to start to be – we would have to be convinced, shall I put it like that.*'[89]

The area coordinator was still more explicit in identifying outcomes as the source of legitimacy (and, likewise, the role of 'expertise' in judging outcomes):

> '*I won't know [if it was worth doing] until the – in terms of the quality of the projects that came forward, I wasn't particularly impressed … as an ex-youth worker with 25 years' experience of taming the most difficult estates in this area … I will be so interested to see the evaluation of these projects at the end of December or whenever they are finished. Cos that'll be the proof of the pudding. And they need to be independently audited*.'[90]

These views of participatory democratic process are evidently underpinned by much more limited faith in citizen capacity than that displayed by Bradford

[87] Interview 4, Keighley area coordinator, 11/01/2007.
[88] Interview 4, Keighley area coordinator, 11/01/2007. This echoes the World Bank view referred to in chapter 6, that PB is only needed in the absence of an effective representative system.
[89] Interview 7, ward councillor, Keighley, 16/01/2007.
[90] Interview 4, Keighley area coordinator, 11/01/2007.

Vision. Thus, Cllr Hopkins believed that a participatory process would unavoidably result in deferral to professionals:

> '*It comes down to how, effectively, do we spend the many millions that we've got, for achieving outcomes for those people? That comes down to trying to have trust of professionals to be able to deliver those services, after engagement, and an understanding of, you know, effective politicians, representatives on the ground who reflect need … What will happen is that individuals will come to the [participatory process], and say we need to get some advice on this, so they will go find some more professionals, and they'll go and employ those, and they'll bring them back to the room, and they will say 'yes, this is', for instance, 'the degree of care we should be giving to this group of people, all those in favour'. And actually we have got lots of people doing that already*.'

The area coordinator was again, perhaps characteristically, blunter:

> '*If you're asking me, do I believe that people should be responsible for their own futures, and they should be directly involved in shaping their own futures, yes, of course I do. I just don't believe that they can do it!*'[91]

Thus, he described how he thought participatory decision-making is '*fine in terms of, what shall we call it, the distribution of funny money, [but] if you try to apply the same process to nuts and bolts everyday services, you are gonna be in serious trouble*.' To illustrate, he described a camping trip he organised as a youth worker:

> '*We thought we would do a little bit of what we now call participatory budgeting. I had six quid per head to spend on those kids for that weekend for food. I said to the kids, what do you want to do? Do you want me to buy the stuff, and I'll get everything, and we'll make sure you've got what you need, and we'll run it over the weekend, or, would you like the six pounds each, you can go off and decide what you want to get. So, what do people say? The six pounds … At the end of the day, almost every one of those kids, by the time it got to 9 o'clock on the Saturday evening, bearing in mind we'd set off on the Friday, were*

[91] Interview 4, Keighley area coordinator, 11/01/2007.

screaming that they've got nothing to eat, they had run out of money, what were we gonna do. The fact remains, when you're looking at things like highways, when you're looking at things like street lighting, when you're looking about the a whole complicated issues of things like cleansing services, social services, services to younger people, all that kind of stuff that's going on – you can't tell me that local people living on [an] estate are going to be able to make informed decisions on where they are going to spend limited budgets. It ain't gonna happen. They won't be able to do it. Because if you have a fixed budget, and you say to people, they could spend all their money on speed-bumps. What happens when the streetlights start going out? What happens when the Police Community Support officer ain't there?'[92]

In this view, service provision is about expertise – '*years and years of training*', and '*you can't train everybody up on a housing estate or in a neighbourhood*'.[93] This does not, of course, imply that defenders of the representative system don't believe citizens are capable of being trained. Clearly, officers and councillors are understood to be citizens who have acquired a level of expertise, which, alongside their representative democratic mandate, qualifies them to made decisions on public funds.[94] However, what is noteworthy (and again a striking contrast with the Bradford Vision perspective) is the absence of any suggestion that citizens bring additional knowledge to the consideration of their own circumstances, over and above that which can be provided by experts.

It follows that control of resources is safest left in the hands of the experts:

'*We can allow people to experiment, because we can take it in the neck when things go wrong. We can provide safety nets. I forgot to say, the burger story: there was actually two cardboard boxes full of salad, burgers, pork, all the, super economy gristle burgers, bait for the fishing tackle, and some fish fingers and all that. So we were a bit clever there, because I wouldn't dream of allowing people to make those choices.*

[92] Interview 4, Keighley area coordinator, 11/01/2007.
[93] Interview 4, Keighley area coordinator, 11/01/2007.
[94] In the case of councillors, the assumption of expertise is perhaps a little more complicated than in the case of officers, resting on the view that the people have chosen their representatives on the basis that they believe they are the best people to do the job. Furthermore, as Cllr Hopkins made clear, there is an expectation that elected representatives will be guided by experts.

You can do it with bits, yeah, maybe, but in terms of basic services that people need, you just can't trust, you cannot trust ordinary Joe and Jenny Public to make the right decisions, and I know that sounds extremely negative but, they can't afford to get it wrong! Can they?'[95]

Unsurprisingly, the state critique of PB also revealed limited faith in the human potential for cooperation and collective decision-making. For Cllr Hopkins:

'*Actually, the more people you put into the room, the more different views you are going to get … I think it will just be another mechanism in which representation comes out of it, a representative form of governance comes out of it, because you won't actually get a common overall response from the other mechanism*.'[96]

Conflict was thus seen as problematic, in contrast to understanding it as a necessary condition for negotiated solidarity. It was, therefore, equally unsurprising that Cllr Hopkin's view of appropriate citizen engagement was actually more about experts educating citizens, not in terms of democratic skills, but rather, education *as* engagement:

'*How do you actually get the public to engage, when, I remember a while ago, white bread's bad for you, brown bread, potatoes, don't drink coffee, do drink wine, there are all these different messages coming out for people, and it's on the ground that dialogue can go on, where you can unpick myths, and actually attempt to lay facts in front of individuals, where I think that's really important that we do engage. Now is that about participatory or is it about education*?' [97]

In this view, citizens are not partners, but vessels – or sources of problems to be solved. Thus, as the 2006-2008 NAP round through which Bradford Vision trialled PB came to an end, an officer from the area coordinator's office suggested that '*the NAP is not necessarily the right place for residents*', because they want somewhere to take their issues, they want them to be acted on, and '*this is too slow paced for them*'.[98] In the run-up to the demise of

[95] Interview 4, Keighley area coordinator, 11/01/2007.
[96] Interview 9, Kris Hopkins, Leader, Bradford Council, 30/01/2007.
[97] Interview 9, Kris Hopkins, Leader, Bradford Council, 30/01/2007. This perspective is a far-cry from the Anti-Federalist hope that government could learn from the people.
[98] Participant observation record: Keighley NAP meeting, 21/02/08.

Bradford Vision, the ideas and values inherent in their approach, that citizens may need support to participate but have something valuable to bring to the decision-making table, were visibly being eroded.

In keeping with the assumption that citizens want 'somewhere to take their issues to be acted on', rather than involvement in solving problems, there were clear doubts about democratic motivation, despite the levels of participation in Keighley. The goal of budget literacy was described as '*fantastic idealism, because I don't actually believe that people care that much about that … when you go to a restaurant, do you expect someone to hand you the wok?*'[99]

Interestingly, both the area coordinator and the ward councillor most involved with the PB process were suspicious of the Eastwood turnout, wondering if they were '*pushed into it … and they didn't really know what they were voting for until they got there.*'[100] Thus, for the area coordinator, mobilising '*a hundred and odd people, you know, in order to sway the vote in the afternoon*' demonstrated that the process was '*easy to rip off*'.[101] When I suggested that the people I spoke to did seem to know what they were there for, he asked:

> '*But is there not an issue there? Is the issue about motivation; is it the issue*?'[102]

And, indeed, perhaps it is. In thinking about the democratic deficit, the Bradford case echoes the U-Decide debates over acceptable democratic motivation. As we have seen, within the egalitarian tradition the desire for change via mobilisation around your needs and your local cause are understood to be, not only acceptable, but arguably necessary for democratic motivation. If, within the tradition reflected by the UK's existing system, these things are dismissed as inappropriate motivation, the question arises of what does count.

Following the reasoning presented in the last chapter, the answer appears to be that only 'representative' democratic motivation is understood to be legitimate. If you enter the decision-making arena, then the implicit expectation within the prevailing tradition is that you will aim to make decisions on behalf of your community, rather than participating as an individual (significantly, in opposition

[99] Interview 4, Keighley area coordinator, 11/01/2007.
[100] Interview 7, ward councillor, Keighley, 16/01/2007.
[101] Interview 4, Keighley area coordinator, 11/01/2007.
[102] Interview 4, Keighley area coordinator, 11/01/2007.

to a primary principle of PB in Porto Alegre). This logic generates the view that participation in real decisions is not in citizens' best interests, because you are personally accountable, not just for your own view, but for the overall decisions, as expressed here:

> '*Well, let me tell you what happens. Ordinary Joe and Jenny Public, who are involved in the process, end up with their windows being poked through, and they end up with their children being beaten up on the street. That's what happens, because not 100% of people are willing to take on responsibility for that decision-making … Someone has to sit in a room with a committee and represent the local community. When a councillor does it, they know what they're letting themselves in for – they're elected by due process … I think it's very naïve for people to assume that you can actually motivate a whole community and people are gonna be happy with decisions being made for them by what's essentially it's their neighbours … All this "power to the people" stuff is fine, but with power comes responsibility, and are people prepared to be accountable to that extent?*'[103]

Participatory processes are therefore suspect because, in the words of the area coordinator:

> '*Even though it looks good with 500 people turning up, there is no guarantee that those people are either representative of their communities that they come from, or secondly, have the mandate to represent that local community … [and] somebody who's self-referring, from an association, group or partnership, cannot detach themselves from their own self-interests.*'[104]

The critique of PB in Bradford clearly demonstrates, not only a rejection of the fundamental tenets of the egalitarian tradition (namely, citizen capacity for collective decision-making, and the right to participate as a sovereign individual), but a staunch faith in the current system as the best possible system (a system on which, of course, the positions of both elected representatives and

[103] Interview 4, Keighley area coordinator, 11/1/2007. This echoes the presumption in Newcastle that accountability goes upwards; in this view it is seen as unworkable for accountability to be held by citizens.
[104] Interview 4, Keighley area coordinator, 11/01/2007.

council officers depend).[105] By implication, the only possible responses to the democratic deficit, within this framework, must therefore be 'demand-side'.

Accordingly, there was a degree of conscious possessiveness over sovereignty, which (understandably, given the centralisation of power in the UK system) is felt to be limited at local level. Thus, the drive for participation was described as '*quite honestly*, *a process that's disempowering local authorities*,'[106] and unrealistic to boot:

> '*What flexibility have we actually got to actually spend, and drive through individual activities? … I am the Leader of the council, but 90 odd percent, probably, of the things I have to do are actually sent down by somebody else. I just get to steer the boat across a few degrees*.'[107]

A MEETING OF DEMOCRATIC NARRATIVES?

As I have discussed, a key feature of Bradford's PB pilot (and the ideologically congruent neighbourhood programme within which it sat) was that it was *state-facing*. In Newcastle, the state looked outwards to communities, and sought to bring them in. In Bradford, a quasi-autonomous public body looked to a sceptical state, and tried to convince them. Thus, the primary focus after the event was 'making the case' to budget holders.[108] Given the gulf between the response of citizens and the response of the state, this was perhaps unsurprising, as the Keighley neighbourhood manager articulated:

> '*You know, the reason all the people from Eastwood came was the parents meeting at Eastwood School the week before. Once they understood that their presence in the room would make an actual difference on who got money in their neighbourhood they came. So that's why the argument with the service providers and agencies is so important. You know, if we win that argument the residents' bit, as long*

[105] This is of course not to suggest that a position within the system precludes people from challenging that democratic narrative, as indeed both these case studies make clear. However, it is important to recognise the power dynamics inherent in any meeting of the two narratives.
[106] Interview 4, Keighley area coordinator, 11/01/2007.
[107] Interview 9, Kris Hopkins, Leader, Bradford Council, 30/01/2007.
[108] Participant observation record: informal interview, Bradford Vision, 24/10/2007.

as it's done properly, and resourced properly and managed sensibly and all the rest of it, I think that will take care of itself. I really do.'[109]

In the run-up to Bradford Vision's demise, there was an evident urgency around embedding the organisation's 'political change' legacy. However, beyond the practical exigencies facing particular actors in particular circumstances, I want to reflect on the how the realities of an encounter between two democratic narratives can impact on the potential for citizen democratic learning.

In my view, the orientation towards the state in Bradford had two major practical implications. Firstly, no citizens were invited to be involved in the PB planning process, a dynamic which appeared to arise through an intense effort to engage the local voluntary sector and local state in Keighley, with the ambition of building local ownership and embedding PB beyond the remit (and potentially limited lifespan) of Bradford Vision. The 'sifting day' (called the scrutiny panel in Bradford) did not include citizens, but was made up of 2 local councillors, 4 public sector officers from the area coordinator's office, health, police and children's services, and one voluntary sector worker. Arguably, the emphasis on persuading the state shaped the process design. Where Newcastle emphasised the role of the process in allowing citizens to develop these skills, in Bradford this was plainly balanced with a felt need to build support from unconvinced power-holders (for example, emphasising the need for strategic partnerships to be present, in terms of who needed to be convinced that it should happen again).[110] In this vein, organisers expressed concerns about finding citizens for the scrutiny panel '*who are at that stage*' of thinking critically about the process, and not just articulating demands.[111]

It is important to note that organisers considered citizen involvement a primary goal, and identified their absence from earlier stages of the process as a weakness (in other words, citizens weren't absent because of a lack of faith in their capacities for involvement), but considered the need to build political will and ownership to be a paramount goal. Thus, organisers reflected that:

[109] Interview 2, Keighley NPM, Bradford, 19/12/2006.
[110] Participant observation record: PB Planning Meeting, Keighley Voluntary Services, 10/10/2006.
[111] Participant observation record: informal interview, Bradford Vision, 17/07/2006.

> '*If all those residents that were there last month all started jumping up and down at once and saying we demand this next year or else, that would probably be counterproductive at this stage you know, because it would be like, oh god, we've stirred up a real hornets' nest here*.'[112]

While the views described above demonstrate that this fear was not unfounded, it is an unambiguous illustration of how the tension between the two democratic narratives serves to constrain opportunities for democratic learning by citizens.

The neighbourhood programme was also 'state-facing' in its tendency to focus on conflict with the state, in particular between power-holders and communities. However, the aim was to overcome this, rather than facilitate communities 'contesting' the state. Importantly, it also served to downplay conflict across or within communities, who were seen to '*want the same things, better health, they want less cancer and heart disease and those sorts of things.*'[113] This contrasts revealingly with the 'negotiated solidarity' between communities in Porto Alegre, which I have called the 'practice of citizenship', and which reflects a genuine shift in sovereignty from the state to the people.

Secondly, the focus on the state generated a felt imperative that the work could not be seen to be political. Thus, an early internal document which highlighted the redistributive aspects of PB was vetoed as 'too political', and great efforts were made to stress the connections to ideologies across the political spectrum:

> '*It comes from a left wing … radical socialist background, and good on them, I say, but that's not useful if you're going to be working with people who don't have those opinions … If you want to mainstream something, you've got to be able to describe it in other ways.*'[114]

Importantly, this was not because organisers disagreed with the social justice potential, but, rather, reflects a pragmatic attempt to sidestep opposition. Tellingly, not only was the main organiser (who was inspired by Porto Alegre) doubtful as to '*whether that circle can actually be squared*',[115] but, as the views above suggest, it seems the powerful were not wholly convinced either.

[112] Interview 2, Keighley NPM, Bradford, 19/12/2006.
[113] Interview 11, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 16/04/2007.
[114] Interview 11, joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision, 16/04/2007.
[115] Interview 2, Keighley NPM, Bradford, 19/12/2006.

The fate of Bradford Vision – despite this cautiousness – underlines the reality of the tension that Bradford's participatory democracy advocates were trying to negotiate. Consequently, these observations are not intended to simplistically imply that a different approach would have more successfully embedded a democratic alternative. However, exploring the detail of how the two traditions interact within serious attempts to challenge the democratic status quo can help us understand the ways in which sovereignty shifts – and the ways in which those who hold power within the existing system can and do resist its capture.

CONCLUSION

PB in Bradford unequivocally belongs to the 'supply-side' family of approaches to the democratic deficit, and demonstrates a clear citizen response to a different form of politics. Following the analysis of the deficit which I presented in chapter 4, PB evidently holds the potential to connect a citizenry which is willing to be active (but unpersuaded by conventional politics as an effective means to do this) with the state.

Nonetheless, Bradford also illustrates the difficulties inherent in – and, I would say, the central importance of – working to enact a concrete shift in sovereignty from the state to the people. Arguably, the tension in Bradford exists in the distinction between democratic activists within the state working to create space for citizens, and a genuine alliance with citizens who demand that space (as represented by PB in Porto Alegre). This returns us centrally to the question raised by Baiocchi *et al*, in their comparison of 'non-ideal' municipalities with and without PB (discussed in chapter 6), and the core question of my thesis: how can the appetite to demand egalitarian democratic process be built in systems which are fundamentally rooted in an elitist, possessive-individualist democratic narrative?

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

In this study, I set out to explore the question of 'democratic appetite' in the UK, with the aim of understanding what might make more of us choose to be democratically active. The conceptual framework for my analysis is provided by a historical account of democratic meaning-making, which counterposes two traditions of thought and action, the elitist democratic narrative and the egalitarian democratic narrative. This framework offers a lens through which we can understand the normative practice of citizenship (and the performance of the state) in the UK.

With this in mind, I examined the nature of what is known as the democratic deficit, in order to understand the context for UK citizens' expression of democratic appetite. I took a close look at the underlying values and assumptions embedded in the structures and practices of the UK democratic system, alongside a review of the formal and informal civic behaviour of its citizens. I present a view which problematises the easy verdict of citizens as 'apathetic', and identifies the UK system as deeply rooted in the elitist democratic narrative. This contrasts strongly with the example provided by Porto Alegrean PB, where an egalitarian model of democracy has generated a significant and inspiring response in terms of citizen engagement.

I then followed this inspiration on its journey to the UK, in order to explore the potential for a similar response in our very different context. The two case studies considered here offer empirical evidence of the potential for increased democratic appetite, as a result of a more egalitarian democratic experience. Importantly, they also provide an opportunity to get under the skin of the values and assumptions animating the practice of citizenship, and the ways in which opportunities for engagement are shaped by different (elected and unelected) actors within the state.

Thus, the experience of participatory budgeting offers a window on the manifestation of UK democratic thought and action. Though small in scale and limited by competing norms and practices, PB can be used to create an alternative (and, for many, unfamiliar) experience of direct citizen decision-

making, rooted in egalitarian democratic values. Its underlying assumptions – that citizens are civically capable (and capable of learning), that democracy is fundamentally collective and that sovereignty should rest with the people not the state – strike a powerful chord with participating citizens. Such citizens commonly share a more critical view of the existing democratic system, which is often described as distant, unresponsive and bureaucratic. Crucially, increased citizen participation is connected to the desire for *different* outcomes.

The evidence therefore suggests that an important aspect of the democratic deficit is to be found in the gulf between what attracts citizens to the idea of democracy and civic participation, and the reality they observe or encounter in the dominant representative system. This arises because the values underpinning the UK democratic system present a marked contrast to those embodied by PB. Our system is ideologically (not only pragmatically) representative in that it presumes the necessity and value of an expert political class, who, by virtue of their enhanced civic capacity, hold sovereignty in place of the people. In addition to the resultant mismatch between citizen democratic desires and democratic experiences, this creates a set of internalised 'truths', shared across the democratic terrain (i.e. by state actors *and* citizens), that politics is the job of politicians, the domain of experts, that politics is ultimately *not our job* as citizens (and moreover, that it is a job we may not necessarily be equipped to do).[1] This illustrates the degree to which the democratic deficit is profoundly associated with the location of sovereignty.

From this conceptual divide, we can infer two different perspectives or standpoints from which democracy – and the democratic deficit – is considered. I have referred to these as a 'citizen-eye view' and an 'engineer's-eye view'. These perspectives illustrate the presumed location of sovereignty. We look at democracy from the place where sovereignty is held – or (perhaps more accurately) from the place where we think it should be held. Therefore, if our aim is to shift sovereignty towards citizens, I suggest that we need to start by looking at the system from a 'citizen-eye' perspective.

Taking this 'citizen-eye' view, the primary question is: what does it look like to participate in this system? The evidence from Newcastle and Bradford

[1] As I suggested in chapter 8, it is plausible that this perception is felt still more strongly by citizens who are less easily engaged with alternative democratic experiences such as PB.

corroborates that from Porto Alegre; in a democratic system, your participation has to matter. In other words, it needs to be clear – to you as a citizen – how your participation connects to outcomes. This, of course, does not mean that individual citizens would always be successful in achieving their aims, but it does mean that you must be able to see how and why decisions are reached in each process that you engage with, and to know that you have had adequate opportunity to express your views and participate in the decision-making process. It means that the process – if not always the outcome – must be changed by your engagement. It also implies a particular understanding of legitimate democratic motivation, that we participate to push for the changes we understand as necessary, whether that relates to our own unmet needs, or a personal conception of the society we want to live in.

This brings us to another question evoked by taking a citizen-eye view: what does democracy *feel* like? The understanding of legitimate democratic motivation suggested above implies that it feels like an action. It is a mode of being: something we do, not something we have. And it is ongoing, a journey. As I argued in chapter 5, if each new citizen comes to a democratic process in order to act, to contribute to change, there cannot be a final conclusion or an endpoint. The potential for conflict is therefore an inescapable element of democracy (as is the need to provide the means for it to be mediated). This was recognised instinctively by many participants in the egalitarian democratic spaces I have presented here. The experience from Porto Alegre illustrates how a process of this type foregrounds social conflicts, but also offers the potential for building solidarity. Thus, it provides a platform for the difficult process of negotiating a collective voice. If we as citizens are reaching a decision together, rather than offering our individual voices to the state so that it can use the information we provide to make decisions on our behalf, then the ability to speak together, to deliberate, to listen and to judge, are placed centre-stage. Arguably, a citizen-eye view of democracy is necessarily collective.

All this has one absolutely fundamental implication. If the participation and judgement of every participating citizen matters, then the democratic process must determine the outcomes reached. This is categorically not to suggest that participating citizens are indifferent to the quality of outcomes, but simply that outcomes need to be validated by democratic process (not used to validate it).

Thus, as I discussed in chapter 4, a framework which specifies acceptable values by which to judge democratic decisions (for example, the neoliberal emphasis on efficiency and economy) does not accord with a citizen-eye view of democracy. From a citizen's perspective, while some might (and some might not!) want to pre-set the destination in keeping with our own view of the world, as participants looking up – not power-holders looking down – we are not the people who get to choose the values and outcomes by which the 'powers that be' all too often presume to validate the process. Therefore, if outcomes matter to us, they *must* be determined within the democratic process. This is where we, as citizens, can have the opportunity to change things – to be sovereign.

Within the representative democratic tradition, assessments of democracy too often approximate an 'engineer's-eye view' rather than a 'citizen-eye view' (which perhaps in part explains why this perspective so often fails to inspire those looking at democracy from a very different place). In the US constitutional debates, Hamilton, Madison and Jay approached the federal government as the stage they would occupy – and reached very different conclusions to the Anti-Federalists, who regarded it as the bid of an elite to rule over them. In Porto Alegrean PB, the state was expected to honour the decisions reached through the participatory forum. In Newcastle and Bradford, the idea of the state-approved quality of outcomes emerged as critical in debates over process.

The idea of a 'right answer', a set of outcomes which can validate or invalidate a democratic system, suggests that democracy is worthwhile because it produces the best outcomes (though this always begs the question, in whose opinion). Alternatively, we might argue, *a priori*, that it is the best system, distinct from the outcomes it generates. This carries the inference (supported by a close look at citizen motivations in Newcastle and Bradford) that people place an explicit value on self-determination (arguably, this is felt particularly strongly in situations where there is an equivalent distrust of the agendas of the powerful). In this sense, egalitarian democracy highlights the appropriate role of the state as facilitating our collective freedom to choose. This illustrates how PB, by reimagining the relationship between citizens and the state, poses fundamental questions. To what extent can the state be a collective expression of our political will? Or, is democracy what politicians do, and can it therefore be separated from citizen participation on instrumental (outcome-based) grounds?

Is being a good democracy non-negotiable, or is it a value to be weighed against other 'goods'? In other words, to what extent is democracy a means (to good governance) and to what extent an end (the right to self-determination)?

Importantly, neither of the two arguments for democracy that I have presented diminishes the importance of outcomes. However, the logical extension of the first argument is that 'bad' outcomes (again, in whose opinion?) can be used to justify a reduction in democracy; therefore it risks strengthening authoritarian rather than democratic tendencies within a system.[2] Conversely, the logical extension of the second argument is that disputed or controversial outcomes direct our attention to *improving* the quality of democratic opportunities. Thus, in chapter 5, I quoted democratic activist Sergio Baierle: 'the rules are important, so dissatisfied people can organise better for the next PB cycle' (Baierle, 2002:4).

For this reason, holding the definition of the 'right answer' outside the democratic process ultimately tends to make sense to existing power holders, in other words, the actors who perceive themselves as having the entitlement (and the opportunity) to define that 'right answer'. In contrast, egalitarian democracy tends to make more sense to the 'ruled', to people who (under the existing arrangements, at least) are only ever likely to have someone else's vision of the 'right answer' imposed on them. This is reinforced by the evidence from Newcastle, and more particularly Bradford, that dissatisfaction with existing outcomes is a powerful motivating force towards alternative forms of democratic engagement (by extension, those that are better served by the outcomes that the existing system produces are less likely to feel the need for change).

As I discussed in chapter 3 (with reference to the US constitutional debates), the two democratic traditions (and so the two associated 'views' I am presenting here) rest on opposing understandings of accountability. In the elitist tradition, the people are ultimately accountable to government, which is responsible for containing our excesses and ensuring our participation is constructive. In the egalitarian tradition, the people are responsible for containing the tendency of government to exercise power undemocratically. This reminds us that

[2] For example, the European Union sanctioned the installation of unelected 'technocrats' in both Greece and Italy in 2011, in response to 'outcomes' they considered undesirable. Similarly, Jessop (2014) reviews ongoing patterns of American and European 'depoliticisation' (the removal of key areas of decision-making from democratic control) in response to fiscal crisis.

government is not neutral, but made up of actors, with associated perspectives, agendas and goals, which – if outcomes are to be determined by democratic process – we can democratically choose to reject.

However, as the distinction between the likely holders of these different views (regarding external validation for outcomes) makes clear, this is not merely a conceptual distinction. Rather, it is ultimately about who has power, and what the limits to that power are – not the extent to which all citizens share any particular (state-sanctioned) vision of the 'right answer'. As illustrated in the US constitutional debates, in the fate of Porto Alegrean PB after 2004, and in the struggles for democratic meaning in Newcastle and Bradford, a genuine challenge to elite power is most often resisted by those who hold that power. Not every response to the democratic deficit rests on an underlying belief that more people should be involved in *exercising* power.

In a sense, this is about recognising that the representative system is an arbitrary moment to 'halt' democracy. The arguments for representative democracy as opposed to dictatorship carry the same logical weight if applied to direct democracy as opposed to representative democracy (as I quoted US revolutionary Ebenezer Fox suggesting, in chapter 3). This issue was illustrated in both Newcastle and Bradford, with reference to the problematic role played by some 'experienced reps' (whose voices were already included in the system) and some voluntary associations (who have been strongly given to understand that there is power in representing others). Thus, a citizen-eye perspective implies attention to the inclusion of those voices which are not present.

Porto Alegrean democratic activists have suggested that one response to anti-democratic hegemonic thought is to encourage reflection on political aspects of decision-making processes, in order to deepen participants' understanding of them as democratically radical (Baierle, 2003:302). In other words, promoting alternative decision-making spaces doesn't defend public resources against elite power unless they are explicitly politicised (for activists in Porto Alegre, this means, among other things, foregrounding a social justice motivation).

The evidence from Newcastle appears to support this line of thought. Delinking processes from explicit criticism of the existing system can facilitate non-transformative support for discrete democratic experiments which do not

ultimately push for a shift in sovereignty within the wider system. However, the Bradford case illustrates the 'naked' response of the state to an unmistakable challenge. A direct challenge clearly compromises the ability of actors within the system to hold open spaces for even discrete democratic experiments (which, while they may not be transformational in a systemic sense, can still be a 'school for citizenship', as I have shown).

Taken together, therefore, the evidence from Newcastle and Bradford appears mixed, from the point of view of an egalitarian democratic activist considering effective responses to the democratic deficit. On the one hand, in both cases it is striking that even a limited experience of a different kind of democracy can generate meaningful civic learning and – importantly – an answering expression of democratic appetite from citizens. Accordingly, it seems clear that building and protecting opportunities for a more egalitarian democratic experience is an appropriate response to the democratic deficit.

On the other hand, turning our attention to the 'supply-side' problem of the democratic deficit, in relation to Baierle's plea for more discussion of the political elements of PB, the learning from Newcastle and Bradford appears to suggest that we are 'damned if we do, damned if we don't.' While this might seem disheartening, it can also be read as no more than a realistic assessment of sovereignty in the UK system as deeply entrenched, and not readily relinquished by its current holders. What a clearly articulated understanding of this situation can offer democratic activists is a mental checklist when faced with a decision-making arena. Where is sovereignty held within this situation, and where is sovereignty held *over* it? What safeguards can we fight for to increase or protect citizen sovereignty? How can the articulation between the egalitarian space and the representative system be increased? Where are the arenas in which citizens can learn the practice of citizenship (for example, opportunities for the negotiation of a collective citizen voice, and citizen-facing problem-solving decision-making)?

I started this thesis with a reflection on the limits of (still valuable) democratic theory which offers motivated citizens conceptual tools for more meaningful engagement (or which articulate an idea of what a 'better' democracy might look like). A 'checklist' such as the one I have just outlined only moves beyond these

limits if it is categorically about creating spaces for ‘learning democracy’ and so supporting *any or all citizens* to participate, rather than how to have a democratic voice in pursuit of your goals.

An associated response to the democratic deficit, therefore, alongside highlighting the value of egalitarian democratic decision-making experiences, is a call for democratic *activists* – not simply active democrats. It is clear from the many and ongoing struggles over democratic values and assumptions that egalitarian democracy is not a ‘thing’ that we as a society can put down and expect to go on existing. It is a mode of being that exists only when we practice it, and it is beset by powerful and hostile interests. It is, perhaps surprisingly, fragile. It therefore needs activists to protect, defend and reinvigorate it, to hold open spaces for more people to cultivate and express a democratic appetite, to learn citizenship.

As I discussed in chapter 4, powerful interests with an ideological agenda around narrowing or impoverishing the democratic arena actively shape the public understanding of democracy. But democracy is not neutral, and it is not static. Addressing the democratic deficit requires an equal and opposite effort to create ideological spaces for the particular, egalitarian democratic values which, the evidence suggests, are likely to offer more meaningful potential for inspiring wider and greater democratic engagement. Therefore, I suggest that democratic activists need clarity on the goal of exposing the poverty of what is commonly meant by democracy, in order to help carve out space for other visions (and resist those visions being tamed). In other words, if the hegemonic view goes unchallenged, then the system goes unchanged – and the democratic deficit remains.

My ‘checklist’ is emphatically not a democratic ‘how-to’ guide. A citizen-eye view doesn’t obviate the need to think about design, but much like the outcomes which must be determined within the democratic arena, it implies that we should ask where the opportunities exist for us *all* to be democratic ‘engineers’. Thus, in Porto Alegrean PB, citizens co-design the democratic system; if the rules weren’t working, then citizens could change the rules. This highlights that the emphasis Baierle places on political discussion *with citizens* is not out of place in the UK context. Although a hostile local environment might at times call for a

pragmatic stance in dialogue with the state, the analysis I have presented suggests that a more political engagement with citizens is important in broadening democratic ownership and ultimately sovereignty. This does not of course rule out identifying deliberately subversive actors within the state, with whom we can build alliances – and in so doing, inviting the shared expression of values which the dominant ideology tries to privatise.

Accordingly, even as this underlines the inspiration available from actually existing egalitarian democratic processes such as Porto Alegrean PB, it reinforces the importance of not simply trying to replicate them. For example, if, as in Newcastle and Bradford, there is an identified need to rebuild community in order to support the collective character of democracy (arguably, the need to undo the individualising tendencies of capitalist, neoliberal hegemonic thought), then citizens in that context need to work on how best to address that problem. Moreover, the formal democratic process is just one arena for the expression of citizenship and counter-hegemonic democratic values. Indeed, in some circumstances, it may be that other (more adversarial) arenas offer more fruitful avenues in hostile democratic environments. For example, as I touched upon in chapter 3, one of the impetuses driving the organised labour movement was a response to anti-democratic ideological forces. The loss of that 'school for citizenship' is often noted or lamented by democratic commentators, though there is less apparent attention to how and where it could be replaced. In a similar vein, workplace democracy offers an arena for democratising decisions in relation to 'private' finance (notably explored by Carol Pateman, 1970).

The reality of our context, and of the wider ideological forces acting on the manifestation of democratic opportunities, means that genuinely alternative democratic arenas may be closed down or co-opted. The evidence presented here suggests that the (collaborative and citizen-facing) effort to create and hold open such spaces, even if short-lived, is worthwhile. What cannot be closed down is the egalitarian democratic tradition, which has animated democratic struggles in many times and places, in the service of social justice.

APPENDIX 1: OVERVIEW OF INTERVIEW DATA

BRADFORD

Reference	Date	Interviewee/s
1i-1xviii.	25/11/2006	18 short interviews, each with between 1 & 5 participants, Keighley Decision Day.
2.	19/12/2006	Keighley Neighbourhood Partnership Manager.
3.	09/01/2007	Voluntary Sector Community Development Worker, Keighley.
4.	11/01/2007	Local government officer, Keighley.
5.	13/01/2007	Joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision.
6.	16/01/2007	Voluntary Sector officer, Keighley.
7.	16/01/2007	Ward councillor, Keighley.
8.	22/01/2007	Neighbourhood Partnership Manager, Bradford Vision.
9.	30/01/2007	Cllr Kris Hopkins, Leader, Bradford Council, Conservative.
10.	26/02/2007	Community activist, Bradford.
11.	16/04/2007	Joint interview, senior management team, Bradford Vision.

NEWCASTLE

Reference	Date	Interviewee/s
12i-12xi.	15/11/2008	11 short interviews, each with between 1 & 8 participants, Newburn Grand Voting Event.
13.	17/11/2008	Ward councillor, Newburn.
14.	17/11/2008	Ward councillor, Newburn.
15i-15xiv.	18/11/2008	14 short interviews, each with between 1 & 6 young people (plus a total of 4 parents and 1 teacher), Walkergate Grand Voting Event.

16.	27/11/2008	Joint interview, council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council.
17.	28/11/2008	Working group member, Newburn ward.
18.	28/11/2008	Joint interview, area coordinators, Newcastle Council.
19i-19xi.	29/11/2008	11 short interviews, each with between 1 & 5 participants, Denton Grand Voting Event.
20.	29/11/2008	Ward councillor, Walkergate.
21.	03/12/2008	Council officer, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council.
22.	26/01/2009	Cllr John Shipley, Leader, Newcastle Council, Liberal Democrat.
23.	26/01/2009	Group interview, 3 youth group members, Newburn ward.
24.	27/01/2009	Ward councillor, Denton.
25.	28/01/2009	Ward councillor, Denton.
26.	16/02/2009	Group interview, 4 working group members, Newburn ward.
27.	02/03/2009	Cllr David Faulkner, deputy Leader, Newcastle Council, Liberal Democrat.
28.	20/03/2009	Working group member, Denton ward.
29.	20/03/2009	Working group member, Denton ward.
30.	26/03/2009	Group interview, 3 working group members, Denton ward.
31.	26/03/2009	Joint interview, working group members, Newburn ward.
32.	27/03/2009	Community development worker, Newcastle Council.
33.	02/04/2009	Working group member, Denton ward.
34.	15/07/2009	Group interview, 4 council officers, Social Policy Unit, Newcastle Council.

APPENDIX 2: PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THIS STUDY

Blakey, Heather (2008) 'Radical innovation or technical fix? Participatory budgeting in the UK: how Latin American participatory traditions are reinterpreted in the British context', *Popular Sovereignty*, 1(1) on-line journal published by CIDADE, Porto Alegre. Available at: http://www.ongcidade.org/site/php/Revista/revista.php.

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